

"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR."—SHAKESPEARE.

ALL THE YEAR ROUND.

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BY THE AUTHOR OF "AUNT MARGARET'S TROUBLE."

BOOK IV.

CHAPTER III. ALFRED TRESCHOTT PLAYS THE PATRON.

No such flourish of trumpets and tapping of kid-gloved hands as encouraged young Trescott heralded Mabel's first appearance in Dublin. She was announced simply as Miss M. A. Bell, from the Theatre Royal, Kilclare, and came out in no more prominent a character than that of Hero in Shakespeare's play of *Much Ado about Nothing*. But that first attempt was sufficient to convince Mr. Barker, the manager, that his new recruit was an acquisition of no common value. He at once engaged her for the season at the munificent salary of two guineas per week! Mabel was transported with joy and gratitude. The great news was written at once to Hazlehurst, and the proposal made that Doooley and her mother should come out and join Mabel at once. Mrs. Saxelby had already mentioned to her daughter that Job Smith, the man who attended to her garden, had made an offer to rent the cottage whenever she should be disposed to let it. There was a lodging to be had in the square in which Mrs. Walton lived that would suit Mabel and her mother and Doooley. Circumstances seemed for once to arrange themselves favourably; nothing was wanting but Mrs. Saxelby's consent to the scheme.

"Why, Mrs. Philip is sure not to hesitate, Mabel," said Aunt Mary, "so anxious as she must be to be with you again."

Mabel, however, did not feel quite so certain about the matter. She knew that the responsibility of making any business arrangement, even the getting rid of such scanty furniture as still belonged to her, would appear very terrible to her mother. "If I could be with mamma for a day or two, I dare say it would all be settled very soon," said Mabel. However, she encouraged herself to hope that Mrs. Saxelby would resolve to make the effort.

And now began for Mabel Earnshaw—alias Miss M. A. Bell—a period of hard, anxious, unremitting toil. Such persons as suppose a player's life to be one of idleness and self-indulgence, or those stage-struck heroes and heroines who

yearn for the theatre as an escape from such common-place elements of success in life as patience, industry, steadiness, and attention, would have been mightily astonished if the faithful record of the work that Mabel put into one week could have been brought under their notice.

Mr. Barker soon found his account in putting forward Miss M. A. Bell as much as possible. And this circumstance—although, of course, desirable for her professional advancement—had the disadvantage of bringing down upon her head a great deal of ill will and jealousy. With whatever outward serenity her proud self-command enabled her to bear it, this sometimes caused her very real pain. It was, too, unfortunate for Mabel that her two staunchest supporters were both peculiarly disliked by their comrades. These were old Jerry Shaw and Alfred Trescott. The former, indeed, was never popular with his fellow-actors, but was tolerated as a privileged person whose eccentricities were licensed by long custom, and who commanded a certain respect by his age and the rigid honesty of his character. But for Alfred Trescott there was but one feeling of distrust and dislike. The insolence of his temper, increased by prosperity to an intolerable and overbearing arrogance, was continually offending those around him to whom he could dare show his real nature; and as Lady Popham's patronage had filled his head with the most extravagant ideas of his own importance and the brilliant future that awaited him, he was careless whom he wounded, or whose animosity he excited amongst the people connected with the Dublin theatre. "What the devil do I care for these confounded show-folks?" he would say, in answer to any remonstrance from his father. "Do you suppose it matters one straw to me what *they* say or think? I don't believe, governor, that you quite understand or realise my position yet."

But though coarsely insolent to the rest of the performers, he made so great a difference in his manner to Mabel as to appear almost deferential by contrast. Her own occupations were so engrossing at this time, and the meditations of her few leisure moments so far removed from any considerations connected with Alfred Trescott, that it was long before she became sensible of the contrast that his behaviour to her presented with his usual demeanour. When she did become aware of it, far from deriving any gratifi-

cation from the fact of being singled out for this distinction, it caused her very great annoyance. Out of the theatre she did not see much of him. The promises he had made in the summer of coming to play for Mr. Earnshaw remained unfulfilled. He was so constantly occupied, he said, with preparations for his concert, and with hard practice; and John Earnshaw and his wife accepted these excuses as being perfectly natural and indeed inevitable. But there were several people in Dublin—the Honourable Arthur Skidley and Walter Charlewood among others—who could have accounted for a great many hours of Alfred Trescott's time, that were certainly neither devoted to study nor passed in attendance on Lady Popham.

Young Trescott, however, did call at Mrs. Walton's residence late in the afternoon of the day on which it had been decided in Merrion-square that Signor Carlo Bensa should be applied to, to conduct the concert. Alfred had told Lady Popham that he was acquainted with Signor Bensa, and would deliver the note to him. But, in truth, he did not accurately know Bensa's address, and had come to Mrs. Walton's house with the double purpose of obtaining the direction and of presenting himself in the character of patron, by skilfully conveying to the family the impression that it was owing to his suggestion that this piece of professional employment had been thrown in Bensa's way.

As Alfred approached the house in the half-built square where Mrs. Walton lived, he heard the clear penetrating tones of a silvery soprano voice ringing through the slightly-built dwelling, and on being shown into the sitting-room, found Carlo Bensa seated at the pianoforte, with Corda standing by his side, and singing a slow scale to his accompaniment. Mrs. Walton and her husband were listening with pleased faces, and Madame Bensa, seated on a low stool by the fire, was pretending to hush down her good-humoured crowing baby, who, holding on by its mother's forefinger, was displaying a pair of very plump mottled legs, partly clad in knitted woolen socks, and perseveringly executing a series of pawing steps with one foot, apparently under the impression that that was the ordinary method of locomotion.

"Oh, Alf dear!" cried Corda, when her brother opened the door. "Oh, Alf!" There was something affecting in the half-timid wholly loving action of the child as she ran up to her brother and took his hand. Alfred was by no means pleased to find her there at that moment, and his first impulse was to push her away impatiently; but, recollecting himself, he changed the movement into a sort of caress, and tapped Corda lightly on the shoulder.

"Signor Bensa," said he, after saluting the others, "you're the very man I wanted to see."

"Ah?" returned the Italian, with an interrogatory raising of his eyebrows and a slight inclination of his head.

"Yes; I came here, in fact, partly to inquire your address. I—I have a note for you."

Alfred found the performance of his new character of patron a little more difficult in practice than in theory. The very simplicity and unobtrusiveness that characterised the whole family made it difficult. However, he was not easily made bashful or embarrassed, and he put Lady Popham's note into Bensa's hands with a flourish.

"I told my lady that I would undertake to deliver it myself. My lady asked me to give you a message, but I thought it better that she should write. I mentioned to my lady that I thought you were the very man for her purpose."

Carlo Bensa read and understood English very well, but Lady Popham's cramped handwriting and peculiar orthography puzzled him. He handed the perfumed note to his wife, who, cutting short baby at the culminating moment when she had just made the discovery that the art of walking was performed by the alternate movement of both legs, and not by the persistent and consecutive pawings of one, whipped that sweetest-tempered of infants in a highly undignified bundle into her lap, and began to read attentively.

"Wants you to go to Merrion-square at two o'clock to-morrow, Charles. All very polite and civil. Can you manage it, dear?"

"Oh, certainly," said Bensa, after a little thought. "At two? Yes; I can go to miladi Popham at two." And the little man referred for a moment to a well-worn leather-bound note-book, containing the list of his engagements.

"You may see a former pupil of yours there," said Alfred, feeling that it might be well to mention it beforehand—"a Miss O'Brien."

"Meess O'Brien? Davvero? Yes. A very amiable young lady; but for singing—!" The Italian made an indescribable gesture expressive of deep dejection, such as a Briton might have thought appropriate for the announcement of some dire misfortune; the death of a dear and valued friend, for instance.

"Ah, indeed!" rejoined Alfred, coolly. "Well, she is a charming girl, Signor Bensa, and a great—," he hesitated for a word, and finally brought out, "friend of yours. She agreed the moment I mentioned your name, and we persuaded Lady Popham to entrust the management of the affair to you. It's about my concert, you know."

"Ah, ah?" said Bensa, receiving the announcement with more self-possession than young Trescott could have desired. "Yes, ab, yes. We shall see, we shall see." And he made a memorandum of the appointment in his note-book.

"My dear Trescott," said Mr. Earnshaw, turning his sightless face in Alfred's direction, "we have been having a great deal of pleasure. Really a great deal. Charles has been trying Corda's voice, and speaks so highly of it. He says she ought to begin to study regularly at once."

"Umph!" said Alfred, rather sulkily, "I

don't know about that. There's plenty of time yet."

"I shall speak to Mr. Trescott, your father, myself," said Bensa, very quietly. "I have a little word to say to him about Corda."

The child's face was radiant with pleasure as she looked up at the singing-master, but it was obvious that her brother's unsympathising manner damped her; she watched him furtively, and stole up close to his side, and apart from the others, as though to disclaim any separation from him.

"I should like to learn, Alf, if papa liked—and you," she added, the last two words quickly and in an under tone.

Her brother did not answer her, but, turning to Mrs. Walton, said, with the faintest possible tinge of colour in his clear dark cheek, "Miss—Miss Mabel is not at home, I suppose?"

"Yes; but very busy. She has had to study four new parts this week, and a rehearsal every day. They don't let her be out of the bill one night. However, it's all for the best, of course. And she is so happy just now, expecting her mother and the little boy."

"Expecting Mrs. Saxelby?"

"Yes; that is to say, hoping that she will come out here. Nothing is settled yet, though."

"Good day, Mrs. Walton. Good day, sir. I must be going. I, too, am so busy just now, I don't know which way to turn. Put on your things, pussy-cat; I'm going home, and will take you with me." Alfred spoke hurriedly, and waited with an impatient frown and compressed lips whilst the child put on her shabby scanty mantle and hat.

"You must have a warmer winter cloak, Corda dear," said Polly, wrapping the child up with kind motherly fingers, and quietly slipping a little knitted shawl round her slender throat as she spoke. "I shall ask your papa to get you one, when I see him."

"Oh no, Madame Bensa, please. Indeed I— I don't want it; papa will be sure to buy me what I want, or—or Alfred," said the child, with a burning blush and a pained uneasy glance at her brother.

"Nonsense, Corda. Gentlemen never think of these things. I shall tell Mr. Trescott that you must be taken great care of, because Mr. Bensa says that you have quite a valuable little gold and diamond musical-box inside that small white throat of yours. There, give baby a kiss, and don't let her pull your curls out by the roots; she means it well, but I'm quite aware it is not agreeable, although she *is* my baby."

Alfred with difficulty repressed his ill humour and impatience until they had left the house; but the moment he got the child into the street he seized her hand roughly, and, pulling her along to keep pace with his rapid stride, said, with sudden harshness, "What the devil's the meaning of this singing foolery? How long has it been going on? Who began it? D—n it, can't you speak?"

It was, in truth, not easy for Corda to speak,

but she made shift to answer, breathlessly, "Please don't be angry, Alf. I didn't think it was wrong. Papa always said that I should learn singing some day, and Mr. Bensa said I had a good voice, and he made me sing the scales two or three times, and—and—oh, I can't go quite so fast, please, dear Alf."

He slackened his pace very slightly, still holding her by the wrist. "And when's this woman coming?" he asked, looking down at his sister with his sidelong glittering glance.

"What woman, Alf?"

"Confound it all, you can be sharp enough sometimes. Mabel's mother, Mrs. Saxelby. I suppose you hear all they say?"

"Oh, not directly, I think, Alf. But indeed I don't know any more than Mrs. Walton told you."

"You're a little humbug."

"Oh, Alf, I'm *not* a humbug; I'm not. And you know better, and it's cruel to say so."

"None of your cheek. I won't stand it. You learn nice behaviour at that house altogether. What do you mean by sneaking and whining to Madame Bensa that you haven't clothes to keep you warm?"

"Oh, Alf!"

"You do whine; and it's a nice reproach to your father, whom you say you're so fond of. And to *me*! But what do you care? So long as you can snivel and curry favour, no matter what impudence you subject us to. Yah! I'm disgusted with your selfishness."

He loosed her little gloveless hand as he spoke, and pushed her from him roughly.

"Oh, Alf! oh, Alf!" The cry seemed to come from the bottom of the little creature's heart, but she uttered no defence, and made no further answer; but as she pressed onward by his side, almost running to keep up with him as he strode recklessly through the crowded thoroughfares, the tears flowed unrestrainedly down the pale face, half hidden in the shadow of her shabby sunburnt hat.

CHAPTER IV. EVIL DAYS IN HAMMERHAM.

The Hutchinses, in their kitchen in New Bridge-street, Mrs. Hatchett, in her genteel educational establishment at Eastfield, the Reverend Decimus Fluke, in the course of his busy round of daily occupations, the mild old clergyman, in his quiet study at Hazlehurst, even Job Smith, digging amongst the cabbages, had all heard rumours of money troubles and disaster impending over wealthy houses, and involving the ruin of poorer ones. Throughout Hammerham, and for miles around it, such rumours circulated.

In drawing-rooms, rich with gold and velvet; in dingy counting-houses whence the gold and velvet came; in marts where busy merchants met, and talked with bated breath and mysterious half-words and nods about the "ugly look of things over yonder;" behind long rows of factory-windows jarring and trembling to the whirr of the unresting wheels; in poor, brick-paved courts, where women clat-

tered in and out on iron patters ; amongst groups of navvies resting from their toil at mid-day beside yawning pits whose earthy bed revealed vast iron main-pipes for the conveyance of gas or water through the town ; by spruce young clerks, and steady middle-aged cashiers ; by doctors, lawyers, tradesmen, and servants—the failure of the great banking firm of Bennett and Bennett was discussed eagerly.

Bennett and Bennett were not Hammerham people ; but they had a branch establishment in the great Midland town ; and around the closed doors of this establishment little knots of people gathered and lingered, with a wistful interest in the barred window-shutters, and an insatiable curiosity about everybody who gained admittance into the silent house. Once or twice during the day succeeding the public announcement that Bennett and Bennett had stopped payment, a cab had dashed up to the closed door of the bank, a young man, carrying papers in his hand, had jumped out of the vehicle, and, after ringing at the bell, had been admitted, and the door again jealously closed behind him. This incident had been much relished at each time of its occurrence by the mob of idlers.

"It's young Charlewood," observed one.

"Ah, Gandry and Charlewood's eldest son," said another.

"Don't he look pale ? I wonder if *they're* hit very bad !"

"Oh, not them ! They're a long chalk too rich. It's the poor folks as suffers the most, allus."

"Very true, sir. Why, do you suppose now as Gandry and Charlewood—or Bennett and Bennett either, for that matter—'ll go without their glass of port wine at dinner to-day ? Not a bit on it. Lord, they could swim in port wine, if they liked to it."

"Ah, and the poor working man helps to pay for it all," chimed in a lounging young fellow, who had passed the whole morning in a lethargy of idleness leaning against a post opposite the bank door.

It was a time altogether of gloom, oppression, and panic. There are many business-houses, stable and flourishing, among us at this day, the heads of which were racked with doubt and terror and uncertainty for weeks after the memorable failure of Bennett and Bennett. Hundreds were ruined irretrievably. The great house raised so dense a dust in falling, that it was not until the cloud had begun to clear off a little that it became possible to ascertain the extent of the ruins that had come crashing down with it. The shock paralysed all those who came within the region of its influence at first, and then there followed a confused *sauve qui peut* scramble amidst the rubbish.

Day after day brought fresh tidings of disaster. Clement Charlewood had been but too correct in his previsions of wide-spread mischief. There was no time to look around for help, to prop the tottering fabrics, or even to depart from them unscathed. Shock suc-

ceeded shock, like those terrible South American earthquakes that lay waste wide cities in a few convulsive throes. Clement was indefatigable, energetic, thinking of everything, sparing his father as much as it was possible to spare him, shielding his mother and sister, as far as in him lay, from the wearing suspense and anxiety he was doomed to suffer himself. They knew that much was wrong, but they did not guess the extent of the mischief.

"If matters come to the worst, my mother and Penny will know it soon enough," he said to his father. "If Penny could *do* anything, I would advise you to be open with her at once ; but as she would be powerless to help us in this matter, we may as well spare her as long as there is hope of our tiding over. But I would recommend that you write a line to Walter, giving him a hint that he may shortly have to retrench very greatly. He is thoughtless, and has got again into that set of Arthur Skidley's, and he has had one way and another very large sums of money from you lately."

"Poor Wat," groaned the father. "Poor Wat, poor Wat ! It's so hard upon him."

"It isn't light upon any of us, sir."

"No ; but Watty has such a spirit, and he's never been taught to know the value of money ; and then he's got into such a high set. There never was such a boy for making high friends as Watty. You'll stand by your brother, Clem ? You—you won't desert him ?"

"Desert him, father ?"

"No, no ; I'm sure you never will, my lad. You'll do better for them all than—You'll remember what I say, Clem, and stand by your brother. Poor Watty ! Such high friends as he'd made !"

In the midst of these anxieties, and of the overwhelming occupations that crowded upon him, Clement received the following note from Mrs. Saxelby :

"Dear Mr. Charlewood. It is so long since I have seen any of you, that I hesitated to write lest you should have forgotten my very existence. But I am so harassed, and so in want of a little advice and assistance, that, remembering your many former kindnesses, and your promises of continued friendship, I venture to ask you to spare me half an hour at the cottage to-day or to-morrow, and at any hour that may suit you. I am leaving Hazlehurst to join Mabel in Ireland. Dooley sends you his love.

"Yours always sincerely,
"CLARA SAXELBY."

"I hear rumours of great disasters in the business world. I trust they do not in any way affect you.

"C. S."

The note was brought to Clement in the office, as he sat at his desk, heaped high with a mass of papers, and after a minute's consideration he hastily wrote a couple of lines, which ran thus :

"Dear Mrs. Saxelby. I will be with you at

eight o'clock this evening. I cannot command my hours, and that will be my only chance of seeing you.

"Yours always,
"C. C."

The day passed in unremitting anxious work on Clement's part. The afternoon post brought no relief to his mind. There came a telegraphic message from the north of England, importing that the strike amongst the railway navvies still continued, that hitherto no arrangement had been come to, and asking for instructions. If the matter were not speedily settled and the work resumed, it would be too late to fulfil the contract within the specified time. Blow followed blow, until Clement felt stunned and dizzy.

"What does my father say, Stephens?" he asked.

"I can't get anything out of the governor, Mr. Clem," replied the old clerk, gloomily shaking his head. "I don't like the look of the governor, sir, at all. He's hit very hard, indeed, is the governor. In seven-and-twenty years, Mr. Clem, since before you were born, I've never seen the governor anything like he is now."

"If there were but myself to bear it," muttered Clement, passing his hand wearily over his hot brow, "I should wish that the worst would come without more delay." He remembered the words afterwards with a sickening pang, to think how little he anticipated what that "worst" would be.

After dinner that evening, Clement left the drawing-room, and was putting on his great-coat in the hall, when Penelope ran down-stairs and beckoned him into a small sitting-room that opened opposite to the dining-room.

"I want to speak to you, Clem," she said, in a whisper. "Come here one moment. Where's papa?"

"I left him in the dining-room. He seemed to be asleep."

Penelope opened the dining-room door very softly and looked in. Then she shut it again as softly, and came and stood beside her brother.

"He is sitting quite still, with his head leaning on his hands," she said; "but I don't think he is asleep. The decanter by his elbow is nearly empty. Oh, Clem, tell me truly, what is the matter? I am not weak; I am not a child. I will do whatever you request, but don't, for Heaven's sake, keep me in the dark."

"Penny," said her brother, taking her hand, "things are very bad with us. This smash of Benett and Benett seems to have been but the beginning of the end."

"Is it ruin, Clem?" she asked, keeping her eyes steadily on his face.

"Not yet. It may be that we shall weather the storm. But from day to day, from hour to hour, there is no certainty. That is the truth as far as I know it myself. These days, since Benett's went, have seemed to me like years."

She put her hand upon his arm. "Clement, you are not going out again to-night?"

"I must go. I have promised. I will be back by ten o'clock."

Still she held him. "I—I wish you need not go," she said. "I feel so depressed, so nervous. Not like me, is it? But I have an unaccountable dread upon me that I cannot describe."

"The natural result of all this strain and suspense, my poor girl. You must be your own brave self, Penny, for my mother's sake."

Penelope Charlewood shook her head and shoulders as one who throws off a weight.

"There isn't trouble enough for you, Clem," she said, with a momentary spark of her old keen spirit in her eyes, "not worry, not anxiety enough for you, but I must make a fool of myself. If it was of any use to say, 'Forgive me,' I'd say it. But it isn't. All I can do is to conduct myself with as much of your patient courage as I can imitate. God bless you, Clem. You're the best son, the dearest brother, the truest—there, there. I'm not going to make an idiot of myself. I shall be up when you come home, but I'll try and get mamma to go to bed."

She dashed the tears from her eyes with the gesture of one who was ashamed of their being seen there, and with a parting pressure of her brother's hand, ran swiftly up-stairs again.

Clement found Mrs. Saxelby awaiting him in the well-known little parlour. The floor was strewn with a litter of straw and torn scraps of paper. A half-packed trunk stood open in one corner of the room, and though the main articles of furniture remained, such small objects of ornament as had survived the old days at Jessamine Cottage were gone.

"Dear Mr. Charlewood," cried the widow, taking his hand, "it is good of you to come to me. I began to fear I should not see you again before I went away."

"You are going immediately?"

"Yes; I did not quite know how soon, when I wrote that note to you yesterday. But I have made up my mind to start to-morrow morning, having heard that by so doing I shall be able to leave Liverpool by the boat that Captain Duff commands. He took Mabel over, and was very kind to her, and it will be a great comfort for me to be in his care. Good Heavens!" she added, in a startled tone, as the light fell fully on Clement's face, "what is the matter? How shockingly ill you look!"

"I am not ill, only harassed. But never mind me now. You sent for me to help you in some way. What can I do for you?"

Then Mrs. Saxelby explained that she had made up her mind to let the cottage, furnished as it was, to Job Smith the gardener and his wife. They had the chance of letting two rooms to a permanent lodger, and were steady respectable people. They would purchase the furniture at a valuation. The old clergyman of Hazlehurst had been very kind, and had helped her. But there were two or three matters as

to which she desired to consult Clement. "About those shares in the Gas Company, you know; and as to a suitable person to receive the rent for me," said Mrs. Saxelby. "I had half a mind to ask Mr. Charlewood to allow one of his clerks to look after it for me. But I didn't know. My late husband's other executor, Mr. Fluke, wouldn't have anything to say to me now, I suppose. All his family so strongly disapprove of poor Mabel's going on the stage."

Then Clement asked her a few questions relative to her money affairs, and promised to see about a proper person whom she could empower to receive her rent from Job Smith.

"I am glad," he said, with a deep sigh, "that you are going to be with Miss Earnshaw. Have you—have you good news of her?"

"Excellent news, thank you. I begin to think, after all, Mr. Charlewood, that Mabel was right in acting as she has done. Right, at all events, in leaving Eastfield. The life there was killing her."

"I must be going, Mrs. Saxelby. I would not have come out at this late hour, but that it was, as I told you in my note, my only chance of seeing you. Give Dooley my love, please."

"You send no message to Mabel then, Mr. Charlewood? Might not you and she be good friends again now?"

The "now" referred in Mrs. Saxelby's mind to Clement's supposed engagement to Miss O'Brien.

"If Miss Earnshaw would care to have me recalled to her remembrance, and to know that I—I—Good-bye, Mrs. Saxelby. Think of me as one who will always be willing to serve you and stand by you as a friend, as long as it may be in his power to do so."

"God bless you, Clement. I am very grateful for your kindness, and I wish you every—every happiness."

"Thank you. I must learn to be content with less than that."

"Must you? I believe there are few people with brighter chances of happiness than Clement Charlewood. But at this moment you are looking harassed and ill. Business troubles, I suppose? I hear of them on all hands."

"Good-bye, Mrs. Saxelby."

"Good-bye, Mr. Charlewood."

Clement had driven to Hazlehurst in a cab, but had dismissed the driver, meaning to return on foot. When he had gone some distance along the straight road, he stopped and turned, fixing his eyes upon the light in the cottage parlour, that shone clear and bright through the darkness. He stood and watched it for some minutes, heedless of the cold penetrating rain that had begun to fall. All at once the steady light moved and disappeared, then shone again for a moment out of an upper window, and then was seen no more. Clement turned resolutely towards the dull flare upon the night sky, that was reflected from the great factory fires and household lights of Hammerham, and with a

long heavy sigh that came labouring from his breast, walked through the black dreary weather towards his home.

SNAKES IN QUEENSLAND.

Of the many species of snakes that infest this distant colony, there are but few intensely venomous, but the individuals of these few species are extremely numerous. The Brown Snake, the Whip Snake, the Diamond Snake, and the Black Snake, are frequently found, especially in the Mitchell district.

A curious circumstance that occurred last year to a friend of mine, a Mitchell squatter, a gentleman of clear honour, and consequently of indisputable credibility. He accompanied me last May when I was out with my men "examining" and surveying his "runs," which were situated on a splendidly-watered creek, the resort (as I soon found to my sorrow) of a tribe of murderous black fellows.

"I had camped* just here, where we now are," said my friend R., "and towards morning I had a nasty dream. I dreamed that I saw a brown snake coming over from *that* direction (pointing to the north), and soon felt it crawling over my bare feet. Guess my surprise, on awakening, to feel a snake actually winding itself between my feet! I was lying on a blanket, with another blanket over me. Remember, I was on my back, and my feet were a few inches apart. Well; this snake first passed over my left foot, then round the sole of my right foot, tickling it horribly. After a pause, it glided over the right foot and round the sole of the other, after which it kept 'dabbing' at both soles, perhaps catching flies, until the titillation almost drove me mad. At length I mustered courage to raise my head and give a 'Hist!' when it quietly slipped away."

I have generally found among my men a belief that the whip snake can jump *forward*. One of my men told me that he came suddenly on one of these virulent little beasts one day, that it immediately sprang at him as high as his breast, and that but for a very active spring on his part it would have "cooked" him. He then picked up a piece of stick just in time; for it made spring number two, and he met it by a blow that knocked it to the ground with a broken back.

The whip snake is a most courageous and vindictive little wretch. I was one day in a boat on the river Logan, when I spied one swimming, and directed one of my men to hit it with his oar. He made a blow at it, but missed. The creature instantly turned and came stem on towards the boat. I made several blows at it with a whip-handle, but the water broke their strength, and the reptile could easily have got away; on it came, however, vindictively hissing, until its back was broken by a lucky stroke.

* Let the reader remember that "camping" means in Australia taking up one's sleeping-place for the night, even on the ground, with or without tents.

In the Mitchell district, the year before last, I had turned in about ten o'clock at night, and lay busily planning out the programme of my future campaign in the far west, not far from Burke and Wills's tract, when all at once, as I turned on my side, I felt a snake underneath the blanket on which I lay, and close to my shoulder. I felt it, through the blanket, gently with my hand. There was no doubt of the fact; there it was, and what was to be done! After much reflection I thought it best to lie still, as, from my weight on the edges of the blanket, it could do no harm until morning, whereas, if I stirred, it would probably have a fair chance at me. So I lay still and slept heartily till after sunrise, when I discovered that the supposed snake was the thong of a stock-whip which my son had deposited there for safety.

Soon after I was sent to the Logan, I was returning one afternoon late to my camp, which was in place very difficult to find even by daylight, but next to impossible in darkness. I was pushing on my horse as rapidly as the thick timber would allow, when I saw an enormous black snake a little to the left of my track. The light was fast failing, and, although I make it a matter of conscience to kill every snake I can, I determined to pass him. To my astonishment, however (I had never seen the like before), the beast made right towards me with a wicked hiss. This was more than I could bear, so I got off my horse, determined to "wipe him out." I don't think I ever had such difficulty in killing a snake, and was never in such danger—saw once, which I will speak of in due course. I selected a piece of wood, and made furious whacks at him, which were unsuccessful. The stick broke in two, but my blood was up; so, fearing that he would escape, I went very close to him to give him a finisher. Before I could do so, he turned with wonderful quickness and seized me by the arm, hanging on to the bite in such a venomously tenacious way that I knew he had emitted his poison. When I felt the puncture I grew reckless, and seized him with both hands, fortunately near the neck, and destroyed him. I brought him to my camp, tying him with a saddle-strap to the D-hook of the saddle, skinned him that evening, and found in him thirteen eggs as large as those of pullets. He was the largest black snake I ever saw—upwards of six feet. I experienced no ill effects, as he had not drawn blood, but had only given me a sharp pinch through my thick coat.

An Irish peasant had settled on the Logan river, having with great industry cleared some hundreds of acres. He had three children, the youngest of whom was about four years old, and one of the loveliest little girls I ever saw. I used often to alight and kiss the little creature, she looked so rosy and fresh, and was kept so clean and tidy. One morning she was romping with her brother near the hut. All at once the latter rushed in:

"Oh, mother, mother, Nelly's been bitten by a snake!"

It was too true. The marks of the reptile's fangs were visible on the instep. They hurried her within doors, and sucked the wound, but the stupor of death lay heavy on her. There was no medicine for many a mile, and no doctor. They walked her about, as long as the little limbs could stir, but at last they laid her down, and, after one wild recognising flash from her glazing eye into her mother's face, and with a shuddering sob, the spirit of poor little Nelly passed away.

On the Saturday succeeding this event the government surveyor, who with his staff was camped about seven miles from me, was returning on foot to his camp accompanied by his chairman. They were walking through long grass, when on a sudden the chairman cried out:

"My God, sir, I'm bitten by something!"

"Run on to camp, then," said my friend. "Fly, and I'll be after you with all the speed I can. Scarey the place when you reach the camp."

I saw the government surveyor next day, and he assured me that even as he spoke he saw the man's eye glazing. When he arrived, he found that the poor fellow had sacrificed his own leg, but was dying fast. Two days before this, the surveyor had been in Brisbane, and had been entrusted with a bottle of excellent cognac for me. A shower of rain had prevented its transmission from his camp to mine, and he now poured brandy down the throat of the dying man. The poor fellow was almost a teetotaller, and yet the bottle of brandy had no more effect than so much water. Meanwhile, the surveyor despatched a man on a fleet horse to a neighbouring station for more spirits, and, by the time the brandy was exhausted, the messenger arrived with a case-bottle of gin. In a few minutes the patient began to show some liveliness, and to talk with vivacity; but not until he had taken the last drop of the gin did he exhibit the slightest sign of inebriation. The instant that he *did* show signs of it, the surveyor felt that he was saved. The surveyor acted nobly. For a whole hour he persisted in sucking the wound of this poor man, whose leg was not over-clean. When next day I saw the patient, he had quite recovered.

The very best thing in the world for snake bites is strong liquor ammonis applied to the wound, and a dilution of the same taken internally. Next to this is a thorough internal saturation by ardent spirits.

A medical gentleman, in conjunction with myself, made experiments of the effects of snake bites on rabbits. One rabbit, a magnificent specimen, ate heartily after being bitten by a diamond snake. We began to think that the reptile must have expended his venom before the trial, when all at once the rabbit, which was eating a lettuce, uttered a squeak, and fell dead without quiver. This was about ten minutes after the bite.

A friend of mine put a whip-snake into a bottle, buried it between three and four feet in the earth, and kept it there undisturbed during

the winter months. When spring was well advanced he took it out, uncorked the bottle, and the beast, which had appeared to be dormant, sprang up at him with such speed that he had a very narrow escape.

The carpet-snake of Queensland is a species of boa, and is venomous. I ought to know this well, for about five years ago I was skinning a monstrous one which I thought dead, when it fastened upon my fingers, and bit me very severely in three places, drawing blood copiously. I shall never forget the looks of my men, and their rapid production of any amount of knives to cut off the finger on the spot. I laughed at their dolorous appearance, wrapped my hand in a handkerchief, and finished the operation of skinning, to their utter amazement.* Nothing can persuade even the most experienced bushmen that *any* snake can be harmless.

About four years ago I witnessed a battle-royal between my son and a carpet-snake. Both showed great determination. My boy was only twelve years old; but he was more than a match for the snake, so I would not interfere. He had picked up a short stick, and after combating for about a quarter of an hour, he succeeded in breaking the brute's back, and thus rendered it an easy prey. It measured eleven feet two inches. A very large opossum was found in its stomach, and in a perfect state of preservation. The last snake-fight I had took place a short time since in the bed of a dry creek that runs into the Thomson river. I was riding along carelessly, when all at once I saw an enormous brown snake wriggling between my horse's legs. Now the brown snake is a thing of horror, so I tried to back my horse with all my strength, but the attempt was useless, so I gave him the spur, and he went over it. I then dismounted, seized a stick which broke at the first blow, and by this time the snake was ascending the steep bank. He was on the point of getting away, when I made a fiercer blow with the fragment that remained in my hand, and broke his back, but it was near the tail, and the beast was able to turn round and make almost a vertical blow at me from above. I don't think I ever in my life experienced such a feeling of alarm as I did during the half second of its approach. I remember seeing its devilish head level with my face, and I remember striking out with my stick, but how I escaped I know not to this hour; however, when my staff came up they found me skinning it. I never saw a larger brown snake; it measured more than six feet in length, but in girth it was immense.

A great deal has been said of the instinctive dread of snakes which is exhibited by four-footed animals. This does not accord with my experience, as I know of dogs and cats having a great liking for killing them; and I have never yet had a horse that showed the slightest alarm even while quite close to them. Once my favourite saddle-horse actually "squashed" a

large black snake which was lying coiled up on a road, and I did not know it until I had got a yard or two beyond the spot.

It is impossible for a stranger to pronounce upon every snake he may come across; still, it may be useful to give a few hints which can be fully understood by every one. Whenever you see a snake *with a neck*, that is, with a hollow behind the head on both sides, and, combined with this, a thin tapering tail, be assured that snake is non-venomous; but when you see a snake with no neck, and, combined with this, a stumpy tail, that snake is in the highest degree venomous.

OLD STORIES RE-TOLD.

SHERIDAN'S DUELS WITH CAPTAIN MATHEWS.

In the year 1771, Miss Linley, the daughter of a musical composer of that day, as famed for her beauty as for her singing, was the delight of Bath. Dr. Burney, Johnson's friend, has left us a formal eulogy of her fine soprano voice and of the exquisite spontaneousness with which she sang, not merely those simple ballads which were the taste of an age that peculiarly affected simplicity, but also the intuitive taste and precision with which she gave the most difficult passages of Handel and of our best old English church music. Of that "nest of nightingales," as Dr. Burney prettily calls the Linley family, Miss Elizabeth Linley, then eighteen, was the queen-bird. Although she had appeared at concerts and oratorios ever since the age of twelve, "The Maid of Bath," as she was generally called in the Crescent, the Pump-room, and in Sidney-gardens, had an unconquerable dislike to the public exercise of her profession, and turned a cold ear to all the lovers, honourable and dishonourable, who crowded around her, tiring her with extravagant flattery, and wearying her with offers of hearts not generally much worth having.

Prominent among these bowing and grimacing lovers was Mr. Walter Long, an old bachelor, whose estates afterwards descended to the celebrated heiress, Mrs. Wellesley Long Pole. Mr. Linley, cold, shrewd, and calculating, had stipulated that his fair daughter, being his apprentice, and a very profitable one too, the lover should, on his marriage, pay him (Linley) one thousand pounds for the loss of her professional services. Miss Linley's tears and remonstrances were treated with indifference. Wearied out at length by the arguments, threats, and remonstrances of her mercenary father, the poor girl at last consented to the marriage. Dresses and jewels were ordered; the day was fixed. Rumour's thousand tongues wagged ceaselessly, in scorn and ridicule, at the unequal match; the Pump-room was agitated; the beaux and ladies fluttering about the baths, with their chocolate cups on the buoyant trays before them, were never weary of discussing the coquettices by which the St. Cecilia of King Bladud's city had ensnared so wealthy a husband.

To the astonishment of the dumb-founded

* The length of this snake (I have the skin yet) was twelve feet and a half.

gossips, the intended marriage was, however, suddenly broken off. The poor girl, deserted apparently by all her friends, threw herself on the generosity of her old suitor, and begged him to release her from the engagement. Mr. Long was noble and generous. He not only released her from the promise, but took upon himself the blame of the separation. Disgusted Linley brought an action for his money, but it was untenable. Mr. Long, patient under the anger of disappointed greed, handed over the sum; and afterwards, in admiration of Miss Linley's candour and amiability, actually settled upon her the sum of three thousand pounds as a small compensation for the pain and persecution which his suit had caused her. The cruel London wits made great fun of this broken-off marriage, and Foote wrote a vulgar farce founded upon that latest bit of Bath scandal.

Among the lovers who now again began to flutter round the Beauty of Bath was Charles Sheridan, the son of an Irish teacher of elocution, who had been an actor and manager in Dublin, and had been driven from the city by theatrical riots. The elder Sheridan seems to have been pedantic, dogmatic, and quarrelsome, and in Dr. Johnson's opinion—the doctor being indignant at a ruined actor being pensioned by the government—"a vain man and a liar." He had boasted that he had once routed the doctor in argument, and that was an unpardonable offence. Boswell had taken a malicious pleasure in relating this boast to the doctor, of whose older friends he was always envious. The Sheridan family had been long a distinguished one, for the father of the elocution-master, an Irish clergyman and schoolmaster—a fiddling, punning, and doggerel-writing divine, thoughtless and extravagant to a marvel—had been one of Swift's special cronies. The elocution-master's wife, an amiable and clever woman, who wrote *Sidney Biddulph*, a novel now forgotten, was a favourite of Dr. Johnson, and is described by Dr. Parr and Tom Moore as "quite celestial," both for her virtues and her genius. The Sheridan family had been three or four years in Bath, and had from the first been very intimate with the Linleys. Charles Sheridan did not, however, advance very much in the affections of the belle and toast of the city. He was grave and studious, and Miss Linley professed merely to regard Charles with esteem as the brother of her bosom friend, Miss Sheridan. She preferred Richard Brinsley, the younger brother.

Richard, then just twenty, had been educated at Harrow under Dr. Parr, who had pronounced him lazy and unambitious. He was fond of poetry; but, to use the awful doctor's words, had "never distinguished himself in Latin or Greek composition." The boy was, however, prompt and acute, and there were vestiges of an original and daring mind. He spoke fervidly and with eloquence. His pranks and his vivacity were the delight of the school. Even then Dr. Parr thought his eyes, countenance, and general manner striking. At twenty he was

already a poet, and, what was better at that juncture, an excellent rider, fencer, and dancer, and a chivalrous gallant young fellow, full of wit and romance, liked by everybody but his father, whose fantastic rules of elocution he tacitly contemned.

Another of Miss Linley's pertinacious admirers at this time was Nathaniel Halhed, a clever young man, who had been Sheridan's friend at Harrow, and since that time a collaborateur with him in embryo farces, newspaper work, and translations. Halhed, soon daunted by the number and pretensions of the fair young singer's lovers, started for India, became a judge, rich, yellow, blessed with endless rupees and an enlarged liver. The field gradually thinned, for Charles Sheridan finding his passion daily increase and his chances of success hourly diminish, also withdrew from the contest. He dared not continue, and wrote Miss Linley a solemn and affecting farewell—which his youngest sister no doubt laughingly delivered—and withdrew into exile in a farm-house about eight miles from Bath. That siege was raised, the enemy beaten off with great discomfiture from "the fort they call a heart." More talk for the Pump-rooms, more remarks from painted tabbies, that "if there ever was a heartless flirt—and how people could—and as to eyes and complexion, &c.—eh, what do you say?" On many of these occasions Richard Sheridan stood forward bravely (and disinterestedly) for the slandered lady whom his brother Charles had loved and lost. This tattle and the sneers of these gossips made it necessary for Miss Linley frequently to meet her defender and adviser (nothing more) in a damp but sequestered grotto in Sidney-gardens, a grotto sheltered by a friendly weeping willow, and in which Sheridan wrote sentimental and graceful verse after the fashion of lovers and aspirants in that artificial age—this sort of Shenstone verse not unfamiliar to readers of old albums and lady's magazines circa 1771 :

Yet oh! if indeed I've offended the maid,
If Delia my humble monitor refuse,
Sweet willow, the next time she visits thy shade,
Fan gently her bosom, and plead its excuse.
And thou, stony grot, in thy arch may'st preserve
Two lingering drops of the night-fallen dew,
And just let them fall at her feet, and they'll serve
As tears of my sorrow entrusted to you.

No doubt the beautiful young lady with the powdered hair rising mountainously over her gentle and sensitive face, turned rose colour when she found those verses in the well-known hand lying on the mossy seat of the indubitably rheumatic grotto, and perhaps, while the pretty flushes still played upon her cheeks, two large dark eyes met hers through the trailing willow branches, and the next moment a sword tinkled against the stone seat as Richard sprang into the cave and pressed her hand, begging pardon (wicked hypocrite!) for his cruelty and mistrust at their last meeting.

Long before this, an Iago, the evil genius

of our old love story, had appeared, and, unnoticed by anybody, had spread his web, and arranged his pitfalls with Satanic subtlety. A Captain Mathews, a married man, had introduced himself to old Linley as a man who could be of service to him. Patrons of this kind were useful in selling concert tickets, and organising musical performances. The old composer was too confiding or too rapt in his studies to see through the scoundrel. Self-interest made him reluctant to discover evil in so zealous a friend. Miss Linley was a guileless, romantic, credulous girl of fourteen, fresh from country retirement, and surrounded by admiring fops, whose flattery was as extravagant and bizarre as it was transparently false. She believed no one's vows, but she pitied their pretended sufferings. For three years Mathews had never ceased his assiduities, his respectful and untiring gallantry, his protestation, and his sighs of counterfeit distress. The innocent girl liked him, and promised him her friendship. To turn this friendship into love, he redoubled his artifices. People now began to take alarm; friends spoke to old Linley; but he was unwilling to lose so useful a friend, and treated the rumours as mere nonsense. Miss Linley's heart was almost lost, and she began to reproach herself for her growing love. She says :

" When he went into the country for the summer, I resolved, whatever it cost me, to tear him from my heart, and when he returned, to avoid him everywhere. With these resolutions I consoled myself till winter. When he returned, he had not been in town a week before we had repeated invitations to his house. Conscious that I could never forget him if I was always to be exposed to his solicitations, I informed my mother of everything he had said to me, and at the same time told her how far he had gained my heart. Oh, my dear friend, had my mother but then acted properly, I had now been happy; but she, too much attached to interest, laughed at my uneasiness, and told me that novels had turned my head; and that I fancied if any one was civil to me he must certainly be in love. She desired I would put such thoughts out of my head, for no man could think seriously of such a child. Thus was I again led into temptation, and exposed to all the artifices of a man whom I already loved but too well, and who was but too sensible of it. I could not fly from the danger. After my first reproof I was ashamed to mention it again to my mother, and I had everything to fear from my father's violent temper. For another year we went on in the same manner, till at last, finding it impossible to conquer my inclinations, he soon brought me to a confession of my weakness, which has been the cause of all my distress."

She now forbade Mathews speaking to her, on which he pretended to be dying, and prayed earnestly for one final interview before he left England for ever. The interview took place. Mrs. Linley, informed of this, taxed her daughter with it, greatly enraged; but on hearing that the conduct of Mathews had been marked by

the strictest honour and respect, she consented to conceal the secret from her husband. This was a second fault in the mother.

The poor girl no longer tried to subdue her love, and still reproached herself with being the cause of such an honest man's wretchedness. Mrs. Linley then made her daughter write a letter to Mathews' arranging an interview, and at the appointed hour went herself, confronted, and reproached him. Mathews, calm, polished, and plausible, however, so won the foolish and selfish mother, that he made her promise, if he swore never to see her daughter alone, that the intimacy between the two families should remain unbroken.

Soon after this, Miss Linley, while on a visit in the country, being told that Mr. Long was going to defend the action brought against him, and plead her interviews with Mr. Mathews, fell into a fever, became delirious, and manifested such symptoms of decline that she had to be sent to the Wells to drink the waters. Whilst there, she heard, to her indignation and anguish, that Mathews, during her illness, had been speaking lightly of her in public, and boasting that it was only love for him that had made her leave Bath. This heartless behaviour shocked and disgusted her, and in her anger she forgot her despondency.

" When I had so far recovered my spirits and health," she says, " as to be able to walk and ride, I became acquainted with Mr. R., who, from the first time he saw me, was particular in his behaviour to me. I did not at first observe it; and, as I thought him an agreeable man, and one who, I was told, bore an unexceptionable character, I did not avoid him as much as I certainly ought. I wished, likewise, by turning my attention to him, to eradicate every impression of Mathews; but though Mr. R. behaved with the greatest delicacy, I found it impossible to love him. I went on in this manner for some time, and, by Mr. R.'s attention to me, incurred the ill will of all the ladies, who did not spare to censure my conduct; but as I was conscious in my own heart of no ill, and wished to convince Mathews that he had not so much reason to boast of his conquest, I paid very little attention to the envy of the women."

Alas! Mr. R., too, was only a cowardly sort of lover. He one day confessed his love, but asked her to marry him privately, as he was entirely dependent on his father, except a small pension he had. At his father's death he would marry her again in the face of the world. Miss Linley, angry at this ignominious proposal, never more allowed Mr. R. to address her as a lover.

" I was thus situated," says the entangled girl, " when Mathews came to the Wells, on his road to Wales. He had been extremely ill at Bath, and when I saw him in the public walk at the Wells, I could scarce keep myself from fainting; there was such an alteration in his person, I could scarcely have believed it possible. He spoke to me once in the walk, and asked me if I resolved to be his death;

declared his illness proceeded from the accounts he had heard of me and R., and that he was now going into the country to die. You may be assured I was greatly affected with his words, but as I had suffered so much in my reputation by my being seen with him, I would not stay to explain myself, or upbraid him with his behaviour to me. I merely told him that the only way to convince me of his sincerity was to leave me, and never see me more. I left him, and immediately went home, where soon after a lady informed me he had fainted in the Long Room, and that his friends had taken him to Wales, given over by all.

"This news made me relapse, and had very nearly cost me my life, till I heard again that he was well and in good spirits, laughing at my distress, and exulting in the success of his scheme. This once more raised my resentment, and I was resolved to encourage Mr. R.; and though I could not consent to go off with him, I told him, with my father's consent, that when it was in his power, if he still retained his love for me, and I was free from any other engagement, I would marry him. When I returned to Bath he followed me; but as he was very much talked of, I would not suffer him to be so particular."

But R. proved, after all, worthless, and Miss Linley began now to think no man was worthy of a woman's heart. In this state of mortification, she was again compelled by her parents to see Mathews, who soon succeeded in vindicating himself and regaining her love. Our story is but the history of a woman's heart—it's storms, its sunshine, and its final peace. Again Mathews's attentions become particular, and people begin again to whisper to old purblind Linley.

Let the persecuted young lady herself relate, in a picture worthy of Stothard, what then happened:

"I was one night going to bed, when I heard my father and mother talking very loud, and my name and Mathews's were repeated very often; this induced me to listen, and I heard my mother tell my father that I was miserable, and that Mathews was equally wretched—that we had loved each other for some years, and that she was sure it would be my death. My father seemed sometimes to pity and sometimes to condemn me; but at last he resolved I should never see him again. In the morning, when I came down to breakfast, my spirits were very low, and I could not refrain from tears; this soon brought on an explanation with my father, to whom I confessed everything that had passed. His behaviour was tender to a degree, and by that method he gained more upon me than if he had treated me harshly. Anger I can withstand, but tenderness I never could. My father, after many arguments, wherein he convinced me of the folly, if not wickedness, of such a connexion, made me promise never to see him more, and told me he would break off all intercourse with the family immediately."

The poor girl's heart was quite lost—she still

had not the courage to turn deaf ears to Mathews's feigned penitence and sham sufferings—but a good genius, stealthy as Mercury, and with a brain brimming with romantic and dramatic contrivances, was approaching fast, and with the cautious softness of a tiger-cat. A winged Perseus was already hovering far above and unseen over the timid and tortured Andromeda. Silently, noiselessly, inflexibly, Sheridan had pursued his purpose of winning the Beauty of Bath, with whom he had been secretly in love ever since he had left Harrow. He had long ago won her confidence and respect, but, "obscure and penniless," as he then described himself, he had not dared to present himself openly in the arena, nor had he had the opportunities granted to the rich gentlemen of fortune, who bought reckless numbers of concert tickets. He had jealously watched Mathews, and was waiting for the opportunity of openly proclaiming himself the lover of Elizabeth Linley. He had at first been won by Mathews's manner, but, detecting his base arts, had retained the character of his confidant, in order the better to discover his designs and frustrate his purposes. Mathews had even boasted to him how cleverly he had deceived the girl, and vaunted that she still believed him to be an angel.

The poor girl still believed in her worthless lover. In a letter, describing the whole unhappy affair, she says:

"When Mr. Sheridan came to me in the evening, I only told him something had happened to make me uneasy, but bade him tell Mathews that I would write to him. I accordingly wrote, and told him every circumstance that had happened; showed him how impossible it was for us to continue any such connexion, and begged—for still I thought him worthy—that he would write to tell me he was convinced by my arguments, and that we might part friends, though unhappy ones. He wrote to me, and comforted me greatly by assuring me of his approbation of my conduct, and that he was ready to acquiesce in anything that would make me happy, as he was unwilling to see my father.

"Mr. Sheridan was appointed to settle everything. He accordingly came to my father and told him what Mathews had said, and that he intended to write to my father, and bind himself in the most solemn manner never to see me again. My father was satisfied with this, and pitied Mathews greatly. He kept his word, and my father was happy that he had settled everything so amicably."

The letter was written, and the foolish father was satisfied that he had ended the matter for ever.

Sheridan prepared to unmask the rascal, by telling Miss Linley that if Mathews broke his word (which he must secretly have known he would), he, as a man of honour, engaged in the affair, would never be seen in company with him again. The very next day Miss Linley discovered on what a shifting shoal she had planted her love. A letter came from Mathews

saying he was going to London for two months, and that if she would not consent to sometimes see him he would shoot himself that very day.

Instead of letting the scoundrel shoot himself or not, just as he chose, the poor girl fell into fits. She must now, she thought, either break her word to her father or cause the death of the man she loved. Poor romantic girl, profoundly ignorant of the world and the world's ways, she little knew how little danger there was of the suicide of the gallant captain, and how wasted was all her tenderness on such a cruel scamp. She continues :

" At last I wrote and expostulated with him once more on the baseness of such a proceeding. This letter, instead of having the wished effect, produced another still more alarming. In this he flung off the tender behaviour for which I always loved him, and put on the language of a tyrant ; told me he would see me—no father on earth should hinder him, and if I would not consent he would take me off by force. I answered this with some warmth, as I began to see I was deceived in him. I then insisted he should never write to me again, but he contrived to make me read a letter directed in another hand, wherein he told me we had both been deceived, through some mistake ; said he had something to communicate of the utmost consequence to my future happiness, and if I would indulge him with ten minutes' conversation, he never after would desire to see me again ; but if I refused the last request I must expect the worst.

" Terrified as I was, with no friend to advise me, I at last consented, and appointed an hour ; but the moment he saw me he locked the door, and drawing a pistol from his pocket, uttered the most horrid imprecations, and swore if I would not bind myself by the most solemn oaths to see him again on his return from London, he would shoot himself before my face. Think, my dear girl, on my cruel situation. What could I do ? Half distracted, I told him I would do anything rather than see him commit so rash an action. This was Saturday, and I promised him, if I was alive, to see him on Wednesday evening, during the concert. On this condition he let me go."

The poor girl was now almost mad with fear and dread of the future. Calling on Miss Sheridan, who was ill, she secreted a bottle of laudanum, resolved to destroy herself, and so save her lover's life and the happiness of her parents. She thus describes her attempted suicide :

" The next Sunday, after church, I left my mother and sisters walking. I sat down, made my will, and wrote a letter to my father and one to Mathews. While I was about it, Mr. Sheridan came in ; he had observed me taking the laudanum, and when he saw me writing he seemed very much alarmed. At last, after swearing him to secrecy, I told him what I intended to do, and begged him to take charge of my letters. He used every argument in the world to dissuade me from it, but finding them all useless, he entreated me at least not

to take it till the afternoon, as he then would tell me something which he was sure would make me lay aside such thoughts entirely. Fearful of his betraying me, I consented, but the moment he was gone took half the quantity, and after dinner, finding it had no effect, took the rest."

But the lover saw the crisis fast approaching, for he had been in Mathews's confidence. He instantly went to two doctors to ask them to call that night at the Linleys'. On returning, to his indescribable horror he found the beautiful girl swooning on the settee, and apparently dying. He ran for the doctors ; she had dropped on the floor apparently dead. By force they opened her mouth and poured down an emetic, which saved her life.

The moment had come for Sheridan to show his love, and expose the wickedness of Mathews. Miss Linley describes the interview :

" Monday evening Sheridan came to me. He expostulated with me with the greatest tenderness, and showed me the dreadful crime I had been about to commit, and for one who was every way unworthy of my least consideration. He then told me every circumstance relative to myself which Mathews had told him. He showed me letters he had received from him, and wherein his villainy was fully explained. Judge what must be my feelings on finding the man for whom I had sacrificed life, fortune, reputation, everything that was dear, the most abandoned wretch that had ever existed. In his last letter to Sheridan he had told him that I had given him so much trouble that he had the greatest inclination to give me up, but his vanity would not let him do that without gaining his point. He therefore said he was resolved, the next time I met him, to throw off the mask ; . . . but if I changed my mind, and would not see him, he was resolved to carry me off by force. The moment I read this horrid letter I fainted, and it was some time before I could recover my senses sufficiently to thank Mr. Sheridan for his opening my eyes. He said he had made Mathews believe that he was equally infamous that he might sooner know his designs, but he said it was not in his power to appear on a friendly footing any longer with such a villain. Mr. Sheridan then asked me what I designed. I told him my mind was in such a state of distraction between anger, remorse, and fear, that I did not know what I should do ; but as Mathews had declared he would ruin my reputation, I was resolved never to stay in Bath."

Sheridan felt that, the flight once taken, her love for him must increase, and that her heart must soon be his. Her marriage must follow such a step, let what obstacles that would, arise. He proposed accompanying her to France and placing her in a convent at St. Quentin, where his sister had stayed four years. Once settled there, tranquil and happy, Sheridan would return and vindicate her conduct to the world.

The day of flight was to be the fatal Wednesday. Miss Sheridan (afterwards Mrs. Lefanu)

was persuaded by her eloquent and dexterous brother to lend money for the travelling expenses, to pack the trunks, and to aid the escape. "At last," says Miss Linley, in her narrative, "Sheridan came with two chairs, and having put me half fainting into one, and my trunks into another, I was carried to a coach that waited in Walcot-street. Sheridan had engaged the wife of one of his servants to go with me as a maid without my knowledge. You may imagine how pleased I was with his delicate behaviour." The sedan-chair, with its precious burden, was carried off while Mr. Linley, his eldest son, and Maria Linley were busy at a concert, from appearing at which the fair Cecilia herself had only been excused by her illness. She was conveyed from her father's house, in the Crescent, to a post-chaise which waited for them in the London road. They reached the metropolis at nine o'clock the next morning.

Charles Lamb has left on record (though he makes several extraordinary mistakes in his short narration) that the young couple, on arriving in the great smoky bewildering city, took refuge at Lamb's godfather's, an oilman, at the Holborn end of Featherstone-buildings. He was a tall-grown pompous person, friendly with John Palmer, the comedian. Lamb's father and mother were there, playing at quadrille, when the pair arrived. With a humorous adroitness, which was, at least, very dramatic, Sheridan introduced Miss Linley to an old friend of his family (Mr. Ewart, a respectable brandy-merchant in the City) as a rich heiress who had consented to elope with him to the Continent; in consequence of which the old gentleman, with many commendations of Sheridan's wisdom for having given up the imprudent pursuit of Miss Linley, not only accommodated the fugitives with a passage on board a ship which he had ready to sail from the port of London to Dunkirk, but gave them letters of recommendation to his correspondents at that place, who with the same zeal and despatch facilitated their journey to Lille. Miss Linley had, on her arrival in France, changed her name to Harley. On leaving Dunkirk, Sheridan at once threw away his temporary character of the chivalrous and platonic protector, and changed into the ardent, devoted, and irresistible lover. He soon convinced his fair charge, who listened not unwillingly to his arguments, that it was impossible for her to ever return to England unsullied but as his wife. There was then still truth and honour in the world, and the love of a brave and honest man was the only consolation left to her lacerated heart. At the latter end of March, 1772, they were married at a little village not far from Calais by a priest as well known as the blacksmith at Gretna-green for his indifference as to how he obtained his fees. At Lille they abandoned all intention of going to St. Quentin, Sheridan meeting an old schoolfellow, who introduced them to the amiable family of Dr. Dolman, who procured Miss Linley an apartment in a convent, after attending her through a short illness produced by fatigue and agitation of mind.

The selfish and unwise father soon arrived, hot, flurried, and angry, chiefly anxious that his rash daughter should fulfil some engagements he had made for her at the ensuing musical festivals. The strict honour of Sheridan's conduct being soon explained, and a promise made that Miss Linley should in a few weeks return to the quiet convent at Lille, the whole party returned amicably to England. The honourable swindler had, in the mean time, written a perfectly cool, innocent sort of letter to his deluded brother Charles, whom Sheridan's landlord had already roused to the disagreeable and startling truth. The quietly contented lover said: "Though you may have been ignorant for some time of our proceedings, *you* never could have been uneasy lest anything should tempt me to depart, even in a thought, from the honour and consistency which engaged me at first. I wrote to M. (Matthews) above a week ago, which, I think, was necessary and right. I hope he has acted the only proper part which was left him; and, to speak from my *feelings*, I cannot but say that I shall be very happy to find no further disagreeable consequences pursuing him; for, as Brutus says of Caesar, &c. I must stop this moment, or I shall lose the post."

Rushing off to Bath, Charles Sheridan found Mathews stark mad with chagrin and hurt vanity, furiously listening in impotent rage, at the Linleys' house, to all the particulars of the bold flight which had so completely defeated his scoundrelly designs. In his vexation, he let fall some imprudent charges against the victorious Esau, who had made such a fool of them both, and those hasty words the bad and mean man stored up as future missiles against his enemy. "For the four or five weeks," says Tom Moore, "during which the young couple were absent, he never ceased to haunt the Sheridan family with inquiries, rumours, and other disturbing visitations; and at length, urged on by the restlessness of revenge, inserted the following violent advertisement in the Bath Chronicle:

"Wednesday, April 8, 1772.

"Mr. Richard S. having attempted, in a letter left behind him for that purpose, to account for his scandalous method of running away from this place, by insinuations derogating from *my* character and that of a young lady, innocent as far as relates to *me* or *my* knowledge; since which he has taken no notice of letters, or even informed his own family of the place where he has hid himself; I can no longer think he deserves the character of a gentleman, and shall therefore trouble myself no further about him than, in this public method, to post him as a L . . . and a treacherous S . . .

"And as I am convinced there have been many malevolent incendiaries concerned in the propagation of this infamous lie, if any of them, unprotected by *age, infirmities, or profession*, will dare to acknowledge the part they have acted, and affirm *to what they have said of me*,

they may depend on receiving the proper reward of their villainy, in the most public manner. The world will be candid enough to judge properly (I make no doubt) of any private abuse on this subject for the future, as nobody can defend himself from an accusation he is ignorant of.

“THOMAS MATTHEWS.”

In vain Miss Sheridan appealed against these charges; in vain Charles Sheridan generously denied them, and was about to seek satisfaction at the sword's point, when Mathews, cowardly as he was frantic, suddenly left Bath for London.

In reply to the slanderous and insolent letters of Mathews, Richard Sheridan declared that he would never sleep in England till he had treated Mathews as he deserved. He kept his word. He sat up all night at Canterbury. His own contemptuous account of the cur's behaviour when challenged in London must here be given:

“Mr. S. came to Mr. Cochrane's, in Crutched-friars (where Mr. M. was lodged), about half-after twelve. The key of Mr. C.'s door was lost. Mr. S. was denied admittance. By two o'clock he got in. Mr. M. had previously been down to the door, and told Mr. S. he should be admitted, and had retired to bed again. He dressed, complained of the cold, endeavoured to get heat into him, called Mr. S. his *dear friend*, and forced him to *sit down*. Mr. S. had been informed that Mr. M. had sworn his death—that Mr. M. had in numberless companies produced bills on France, whither he meant to retire on the completion of his revenge. Mr. M. had warned Mr. Ewart to advise his friend not to come in his way without a sword, as he could not answer for the consequences. Mr. M. had left two letters for Mr. S., in which he declares he is to be met with at *any* hour, and begs Mr. S. will not ‘deprive himself of so much sleep, or stand on any ceremony.’ Mr. S. called on him at the hour mentioned; Mr. S. was admitted with the difficulty mentioned. Mr. S. declares that, on Mr. M.'s perceiving that he came to answer them to his challenge, he does not remember ever to have seen a *man* behave so perfectly dastardly. Mr. M. detained Mr. S. till seven o'clock the next morning. He (Mr. M.) said he never meant to quarrel with Mr. S. He convinced Mr. S. that his enmity ought to be directed solely against his brother and another gentleman at Bath. Mr. S. went to Bath. . . .”

On his arrival at Bath with the Linleys, Richard instantly accused Charles of the slander. Charles indignantly denied it, and approved with warmth of the elopement. As soon as the family had retired for the night, the two brothers slipped out and took post to London, Richard Sheridan leaving behind him the following letter for Mr. Wade, the master of the ceremonies. It is a curious specimen of the duellist's punctilio in that age:

“Sir. I ought to apologise to you for again

troubling you with a subject which should concern so few. I find Mr. Mathews's behaviour to have been such that I cannot be satisfied with his *concession*, as a *consequence* of an explanation from me. I called on Mr. Mathews last Wednesday night, at Mr. Cochrane's, without the smallest expectation of coming to any *verbal* explanation with him. A proposal of a *peaceful* meeting the next day was the consequence, which ended in those advertisements and the letter to you. As for Mr. Mathews's honour or *spirit* in this whole affair, I shall only add that a few hours may possibly give some proof of the latter; while, in my own justification, I affirm that it was far from being my fault that this point now remains to be determined. On discovering Mr. Mathews's benevolent interposition in my own family, I have counter-ordered the advertisements that were agreed on, as I think even an *explanation* would now misbecome me: an agreement to them was the effect more of mere *charity* than *judgment*. As I find it necessary to make all my sentiments as public as possible, your declaring this will greatly oblige—Your very humble servant, R. B. Sheridan. Sat, 12 o'clock, May 2nd, 1772.

The scenes the next morning in the romantic and impulsive Linley and Sheridan families were terrible. Everybody was in tears; Miss Linley and all the ladies fainted. The high words of the night before had been overheard, and it was supposed that the brothers had left Bath for a deadly combat. Grave Dr. Priestley, who was lodging in the Linleys' house, was the incongruous witness of this excitement and terror.

Instantly on his arrival in town, Sheridan called the cowardly rogue out, Mr. Ewart being his second; Captain Knight officiated for the Welshman. They entered Hyde Park about six o'clock, and walked together to the Ring. Sheridan, in his own account, says:

“Mr. Mathews refusing to make any other acknowledgment than he had done, I observed that we were come to the ground; Mr. Mathews objected to the spot, and appealed to you. We proceeded to the back of a building on the other side of the Ring; the ground was there perfectly level. I called on him and drew my sword (he having previously declined pistols). Mr. Ewart observed a sentinel on the other side of the building; we advanced to another part of the park. I stopped again at a seemingly convenient place; Mr. Mathews objected to the observation of some people at a great distance, and proposed to retire to the Hercules' Pillars till the park should be clear; we did so. In a little time we returned. I again drew my sword; Mr. Mathews again objected to the observation of a person who seemed to watch us. Mr. Ewart observed that the chance was equal; and engaged that no one should stop him, should it be necessary for him to retire to the gate, where we had a chaise and four, which was equally at his service. Mr. Mathews declared that he would not engage while there was any one in sight, and proposed to defer it

till next morning. I turned to you and said that 'this was trifling work,' that I could not admit of any delay, and engaged to remove the gentleman (who proved to be an officer), and who then left."

The shirker was at last aroused by taunts (as sluggish bulls in the Spanish arenas are stimulated by fireworks). He drew his reluctant sword and threw himself into position. Sheridan was on him in a moment, hot as Tybalt. The thrusts were swift and furious; the parries subtle and dexterous; one turn of the wrist, one glance of the steel, and the heart of one or the other would pour out its best life-blood. Suddenly, amid all this cunning of fence, Sheridan, with a wild impulse of rage and fury, leaped within his adversary's guard, dashed his sword from his hand, and drove him to the ground. There, bleeding and bruised, the slanderer sued for his life, and signed a full confession and retraction of his published falsehoods. Sheridan then left him in scorn and disgust, and, on his return to Bath, instantly published in the public journals the man's abject confession.

Maddened by the contempt of the world, and as covered with disgrace as a thief just fresh from the pillory, Mathews skulked back to his Glamorganshire property, there also to find himself scouted in the ball-room, pointed at at the covert-side, and derided in the sessions court. Stung to rage, and as a last hope, he returned to the scene of his hopeless disgrace and demanded another meeting. At last he was thirsty for blood and eager to die, if he could only expire on the body of his dead rival.

Sheridan's friends urged him not to go out. Mathews was indelibly disgraced, and had been fairly defeated; but there is gunpowder in an Irishman's blood, and Sheridan was too chivalrous to refuse the meeting.

The two inveterate enemies met on Kingsdown, outside Bath. Mr. Barnett was Sheridan's second; Captain Knight the captain's. They had both pistols and swords this time; death to one or both seemed certain. Mathews had nothing to lose. Mr. Sheridan had boundless hope before him, a love transcendently fervent and pure, and the career of a great mind. All these, however, he cast behind him, as of no more value than the cocked-hat or laced coat he threw upon the turf, and the fight began with a relentless and deadly fury. The pistols were pointed with care, but both discharges were without effect. The two duelists then flashed out their swords and rushed upon each other with a ferocity almost unknown in the fashionable English duel. Their swords met in thrust and parry quicker than the eye could follow—the *carte* and *tierce* and *stab* of madmen, eager only to kill or to be killed. An opening of a hair's breadth came, and Sheridan rushed blindly in to grapple Mathews's sword-wrist, and disarm him as before. But Mathews had this time the cunning as well as the savagery of delirium and despair; he twisted away his sword-arm and closed on his wily and dangerous an-

tagonist. The struggle now was foot to foot, chest to chest, wrestling, hewing, stabbing with swords shortened into daggers. Passion and skill were on both sides. Both were in the prime of life—robust, lithe, sinewy, and powerful. Both were bleeding, and pale with the paroxysm of their rage. Each was trying to get his sword free to pass it straight through the lungs or heart of the other. Both were severely wounded and in danger. At last, in a scuffling wrestle, they both fell to the ground, weak with loss of blood, and in that heavy fall both their swords snapped in two.

Mathews was uppermost, and sneeringly triumphant at the advantage. He pressed his whole weight on Sheridan, and stabbing at his chest and side with his broken sword, exultingly demanded of him whether he would beg for his life.

"Never," gasped Sheridan, "never;" then fell back and fainted from loss of blood.

The disgraceful seconds, who had calmly permitted this savage duel, now interposed, and carried Sheridan to his chaise. Mathews and his friend proceeded immediately to London. Sheridan's wounds were deep and dangerous, and confined him to his bed for several weeks. Of the scoundrel we hear no more. He had had his quietus at last, both from the pen and the sword. Miss Linley, though in agony at the danger of the hero who had twice ventured his life for her, was never permitted to see him till long after he recovered. Old Sheridan thought the match a disgrace, and so did old Linley. Two old pedants! Young Sheridan was of no profession, and had no expectations. He had written some essays, but who could live on essays? Above all, the audacious fellow disliked the Maid of Bath's singing in public; but who could baffle so artful, dramatic, and ingenious a lover? He tried all the disguises of Proteus; he even, as a coachman, drove the glass coach that Miss Linley ordered to and from the concert. They met in this way frequently, and also corresponded. At length Sheridan entered himself at the Middle Temple, and the selfish and unwise Linleys then gave way, but with a bad grace. The two devoted lovers were married on the 13th of April, 1773. Sheridan reluctantly allowed his beautiful young wife to appear once more at Oxford and also at the Worcester Festival, compelling her, however (to old grubbing Linley's horror and dismay), to put all the money given her into the plate of the charity. For this foolish but chivalrous pride Dr. Johnson highly commended him.

The doctor, with all the high spirit of a Roman senator, exclaimed, "He resolved wisely and nobly, to be sure. He is a brave man. Would not a gentleman be disgraced by having his wife sing publicly for hire? No, sir, there can be no doubt here. I know not if I should not prepare myself for a public singer as readily as let my wife be one."

The young couple were then living at a pretty rose-covered cottage at East Burnham.

They spent the winter with Prince Hoare, the composer. In the spring following, Sheridan broke out in a gorgeous house in Orchard-street, Portman-square. With that step began his ruin. That was in 1774. In 1816, Sheridan, a worn-out, drunken, friendless, impoverished, disgraced man, who had recklessly thrown away his genius, expired in the extremest poverty, the sheriff's officers eager to carry him to die in a Cursitor-street sponging-house.

On a cast of that small delicate nervous hand of Sheridan's, that had twice grasped the sword with such deadly determination to chastise a scoundrel, Tom Moore wrote this smart epigram :

Good at a fight, but better at a play ;
God-like in giving, but the devil to pay.

IN DIFFICULTIES. THREE STAGES.

THIRD STAGE. THROUGH THE BANKRUPTCY COURT.

THERE is one particular in which the inmates of the sponging-house in Bream's-buildings and those of Whitecross-street prison, resemble each other. Every individual among them is—according to his own account—on the eve of release. Ask any prisoner for debt when he expects to be set free, and in ninety-nine instances out of a hundred he will reply that he is certain to be at liberty next day, or, at furthest, in a day or two. "Arrangements are being made," or "The affair will be settled off-hand," or "The trifles he is in for would not detain him a day, but that there are other matters which would be compromised if he paid off this detainer;" and so forth. It is very rare indeed to find a prisoner who has looked his affairs in the face.

In Whitecross-street, it is astonishing what an amount of freemasonry exists among the residents. No sooner does a new inmate make his appearance in a ward, than two or three of his fellow-prisoners make up to him and question him in the most off-hand manner as to how much he is "in for," whether he has been arrested on a capias or a *ca. sa.*, whether he intends to "go through the mill" (which means, pass through the Bankruptcy Court), or expects to settle? There is nothing offensive or impertinent in the way these interrogations are put, and he who is questioned is generally quite as ready to answer as the questioners are to ask. He finds himself in a position so new, that he is glad to find any one who will give him information. Prisoners are generally much disposed to help each other. When a prisoner is too poor to pay for his rations at the general table, he is served by the warden with food from the prison kitchen. This is called being "on the county," for I believe the county of Middlesex pays for the victuals of all who are too poor to feed themselves. The food is very fair in its way, but the having to eat it alone, and having it brought in three times a day for one or two prisoners in the

ward, is humiliating, and is an open confession of destitution.

I would rather pass three months in solitary confinement, with the means of improving my mind, than remain one month in Whitecross-street. Not that all the inmates of the prison are of the ruffian stamp. I have met as gentlemanly and intelligent men in Whitecross-street as I have met out of it, and I have had as kind offers of service made me in their small way by men in difficulties as I ever had by wealthy persons in the every-day world. But the bad in that place are very bad. Card-sharers, betting loafers, blacklegs, joint-stock company swindlers, captains who never belonged to any regiment, clergymen who have been deprived of their curacies or livings, all these are mixed up with men who, though in debt, are respectable, and who are struggling their hardest to get out of their difficulties. To the tavern-haunting ruffian—whose only source of income is what he can pick up at cards, in flash bets, and by exacting payment of what is lost to him, but "welsing" when he loses to others—it is no punishment at all to be shut up in Whitecross-street for a month or two. But to the decently educated mechanic, the respectable shopkeeper, or the man who, although poor, is a gentleman in his habits and ideas, it is a very great punishment.

In one of the abominable sleeping-bunks (which I have described in a previous chapter) near me, was a young man—a student, if I remember right, in some missionary college—and next to him was a clergyman, the coolest possible specimen of an unprincipled swindler, though talking at times an immense deal of cant. This reverend gentleman, some sixty years of age, was the incumbent of a large parish about a hundred miles from London. His living was worth about five hundred pounds a year, and his wife had six hundred pounds a year in her own right. "I married her for her money," the fellow told us openly, though he had never seen one of us a week before. "She was very ugly; she soon got jealous of every woman that came near me." This with a wink which satyr might have been proud of. "She demanded a legal separation; I consented on condition that she allowed me half the money; she agreed; but I found I could not get on with three hundred pounds a year besides my living. The bishop refused to induct me into a better living which had been presented me, because, he said, there was something against my morals; and as my debts amounted to three thousand six hundred pounds, they arrested me, and now I must wipe all off in the Bankruptcy Court." As a jolly boon companion—he used somehow to get spirits into the prison, although goodness knows how, and was very liberal with the punch he made—I never knew a pleasanter fellow than this reverend gentleman; but I hope there are not many clergymen of the English Church like him, and I do not believe there are.

But by far the best fellow in the ward was

an ex-captain of heavy dragoons, who was on the eve of passing through the Bankruptcy Court for the fourth time. He was one of the biggest men, and one of the most cheery vagabonds, I ever came across. He told numberless stories of his adventures and slips in the monetary line, in which, even by his own account, his conduct had been the reverse of honest. According to his history, he had commenced life with six thousand pounds a year and a commission in a crack cavalry regiment. "But," as he used to say with the utmost gravity, "I made the running too early in the race, and could not 'stay' with the other horses. In six years I had sold every acre of land, every pound of Consols, and had run on the wrong side of the post to the tune of twelve thousand pounds. I sold out, and the price of my troop paid half my debts. I went through the court for about six thousand pounds, and then set to work as a private gentleman. I lived a little by betting, a little by whist, a little by billiards, a little by a few fivers and tenners that I 'borrowed' from friends and relations when I was very hard up. So long as I kept to what I understood, I got on well enough; but the devil tempted me to set up as a wine-merchant, and in one year I lost—that is, I *owed*, for I had no losses in trade—fifteen hundred pounds, and I then went through the court the second time. How did I lose the money? I'll tell you. I used to get, say, three hundred pounds' or four hundred pounds' worth of wine, giving three months' bills to the importer for what I bought. When my customers paid me, I spent the money, and did not meet my engagements. The wholesale wine-merchants got angry; one of them arrested me; and I had to go through the court. I was sent back, and had to remain six months in this hole. I then set up as a coal-merchant, but made a mess of that; for I found that I paid higher for the coals I bought than I could retail them for, even if I had sold them by the sack out of a hand cart. So I had to go through the court as a coal-merchant. Since then I have been a promoter of companies, and that *was* the jolliest game by far. Why, I had at one time a matter of nearly four thousand pounds to my credit in one of the City banks. But the times all went bad, and I was sued right and left by those who had taken shares in the concerns I had 'promoted,' and so I was arrested, and here I am. The Commissioner made some difficulty, the other day, about my cash account; but I shall be all right soon, and shall slip through the court very easily. If you are inclined to do anything about any horse for the Chester Cup, I am your man." I met him the other day in the Dover train; he told me he was going to Paris for a week, he had taken again to his old business of betting, and had "landed seven hundred pounds upon Hermit" at the last Derby.

During the short time that I was an inmate of the prison, seven persons who were prisoners with me lost their situations, and entire means of living, from being shut up. One was a curate

in a West-end parish, two were officers in the army, a third was a clerk in a merchant's office, a fourth was employed in some waterworks, a fifth was a superintendent of insurance agencies, a sixth and myself were travellers for wholesale houses. All these persons had done no worse than been careless about money matters. Not that even this kind of indebtedness can be defended; but it is a poor, a short-sighted, and a cruel policy to punish a man by the loss of his employment—which is certain to follow his being locked up—and to punish all his creditors at the same time. The whole system of debt-recovery and imprisonment for debt is very faulty indeed. It promotes rascality. The only persons who profit by it are attorneys of a certain class. To them its abolition would be the depriving them of what they almost consider as their "vested interests." Not but that I consider these gentlemen do their best for their clients, and are fairly entitled to whatever they earn, or gain, or make in their business. But it seems to me that the welfare of the creditor ought to be the first consideration, and if it be not, it would be as well to have no bankruptcy laws. Take my own case. My expenses at Bream's-buildings and Whitecross-street, together with fees for legal advice, expenses of the court, and other items, amounted to rather more than double the amount of the debt which I had been put into prison for. Surely common sense was wanting when such a code of bankruptcy laws was invented.

Whilst I was in Whitecross-street, a very wealthy merchant was arrested and brought in to the prison. When I say "very wealthy," I mean that he had the reputation of being so, although it turned out, when his affairs came to be looked into, he had been insolvent for four years. He was sued, and judgment being signed for a very large amount, he was taken upon a warrant, issued without any notice, on affidavit that the debtor was about to leave the country. He was no doubt going to France; but he had no intention of remaining there. It seems that it was the interest of certain people to make him a bankrupt, and he was accordingly made one. But when he appeared before the Commissioner, the magnitude of his debts—something like three hundred and eighty thousand pounds—seemed to inspire respect, and he was treated with the utmost consideration, even when he went up for his last examination; and when it was well known that his estate would not pay more than two shillings in the pound. In Whitecross-street he had many small indulgences granted him that were denied to others. One of the aldermen came to see him, another sent him wine and game, a member of parliament left a haunch of venison at the gate for him. And yet it turned out—and must have been well known to many of those who were most civil to him—that this man had commenced the most gigantic speculations with no capital whatever, and that he had settled about thirty thousand pounds upon his wife. He did not remain more than a week in Whitecross-

street. And when he went up for his final discharge before the Commissioner, he was hardly asked a question, though, to my certain knowledge, more than a dozen families had been utterly ruined by his failure.

In my last chapter I mentioned that, having filed my petition as a bankrupt, I went before the Commissioner to ask that I might be released from prison, but was refused the boon, one creditor having objected, and had, therefore, to go back to prison until the choice of assignees. This took place about a fortnight later. The theory of this ceremony is, that all the creditors of a prisoner meet together, and select among themselves, by open voting, the individual whom they deem the most fitting person to look after their interests. But the practice is very different. To these meetings of assignees hardly any creditors, save two or three of the chief, ever come; and of those who do, each try to be made assignee, so that he may name his own legal adviser as solicitor for the estate of the bankrupt. If the latter have failed for a good round sum, to be named solicitor for the estate is worth several hundred—sometimes one or two thousand—pounds. Even in my petty case, to get the solicitorship of the estate was twenty or thirty pounds in the pocket of the attorney; and so, out of the three creditors who attended the meeting, two came provided with attorneys. Of course each creditor voted for himself to be assignee, and so the difficulty to be got over was the third gentleman. Now, this third happened to be a hard-headed Scotsman, a man of business in every way. At first he would not vote for either one or other of the other two creditors; but at last he was talked over, and I have reason to believe that matters were "made pleasant" to him by a cheque for five pounds, and to the others by an undertaking that whatever pickings there might be upon my carcass should be equally divided between the solicitors of the other two parties. All this took place in court under the nose of the Commissioner; but, as other cases were going on at the same time, and as this was considered a purely private arrangement, no notice was taken of it. At last, the messenger, or clerk of the court, was informed that *In re Smith*, Mr. Tossels, accountant, of Crow-street, was appointed assignee, and that he, Mr. Tossels, had named Mr. Firkenson, attorney, of Great James-street, solicitor to the estate. The choice of assignees being thus made, I renewed my application for release from custody.

It happened that Mr. Tossels—nominally an accountant, but really a discounter of accommodation bills, who held the acceptance mentioned in my last chapter as having my name behind it—was the creditor who had opposed my discharge when I had asked for it on filing my petition. He might oppose my discharge a second time. It was not certain that he would succeed, but it was by no means certain that he would not.

At any rate, my own solicitor—who had seen me thus far on my road, but who was now about to take leave of me, as another solicitor had been appointed to the estate—advised me not to risk it before I had seen how the land lay. "Take my advice," said he. "I know Tossels, and I know Firkenson; they have it in their power to give you a great deal of trouble. Matters in the Bankruptcy Court are managed a good deal by the rule of thumb. Before I ask for your discharge from custody, let me have a little talk with Tossels. He has had to give up about ten pounds of the pickings he would have got out of you. Will you give that amount to 'square' him and make all safe?" At first I was inclined to declare that I would stand on my rights according to English law. "Don't talk rubbish," said my solicitor; "whether would you rather be certain of going home tonight, or run the chance of opposition, and being sent back to jail, on the plea that you are a commercial traveller, and as likely as not to go abroad; or else that, having no employment, you have nothing to keep you in England, and that you might slip away to America or Australia? If Tossels were to make this a reason of opposition to your release, the Commissioner might order you to find very heavy bail for your appearance to answer in bankruptcy. He might take another view of the case; but, just as likely as not, he might take this, particularly if Tossels were very urgent."

I told my solicitor that he might do as he deemed best, and I saw him for full ten minutes in close consultation with Tossels and Firkenson. He then came towards me smiling, and saying he had "squared" the affair, having given his undertaking to pay Tossels ten pounds on my behalf before my next meeting, and having also promised that my accounts should be prepared by the same gentleman in his character of accountant. He then formally asked for my discharge from custody, and, there being no opposition, I at once obtained it. A document, called my "protection," was then ordered to be made out, by virtue of which I could not be arrested, or taken in execution, on any civil process whatever. And thus I was free to go home, though it was necessary for me to return to Whitecross-street for an hour or two until certain papers were completed.

"What luck?" was the salutation that greeted me on every side when I got back to the ward. When I told my fellow-prisoners that I had pulled through this stage of my proceedings, they seemed almost as glad as if they themselves had all been set at liberty. And when, later in the afternoon, the warden came to tell me that my release had come and I was free to depart, they gave me three hearty cheers.

I arrived at home exactly three weeks after my first arrest. The effects of it had been to lose me my situation; to make me spend, what with one expense and another, and fees of court, about thirty-five pounds; to bring my affairs no nearer to a settlement than they were

before; and to force me into bankruptcy, which would end in my creditors not getting paid a penny, nor a halfpenny, in the pound. I was so far the sufferer, that I had to look out for another situation and begin the world afresh; my creditors were so far the sufferers, as that I was—or would very soon be—legally free from all my liabilities towards them. So much for imprisonment for debt, and our present law of bankruptcy.

My first meeting—playfully called that “for choice of assignees”—being over, my second—called “for examination and discharge”—was fixed for a day some six weeks later. By this time I was quite up to all the moves on the bankruptcy board, and had fully imbibed that spirit which possesses a man who is hunted by difficulties and creditors. I saw that my game lay in keeping my assignee, Tossels, and his attorney, Ferkinson, in good humour. The ten pounds promised to the former I paid, as well as five pounds for making up my accounts, and five pounds more as a fee for trouble. The original amount of the bill of which Tossels was the holder, was a hundred and twenty pounds. Of this, about sixty pounds remained due. I had paid, under various pretences, twenty pounds to Tossels, so there remained but a balance of forty pounds. I now proposed—through a third party—to give him two bills of twenty pounds each, payable at three and six months, provided he gave his word that he would not oppose me at my meeting for discharge. He objected that, in consequence of my being out of any engagement or situation, my signature was worth nothing. But he said that if my father-in-law would give a written undertaking to a third party—Tossels's name not being mentioned in the letter, though he was the person to benefit thereby—that, if I obtained my discharge at the next meeting, he, my father-in-law, would give the said party two bills for twenty-five pounds each, at three and six months, then Tossels would not only not oppose me, but would make it his special business to facilitate my going through the court smoothly. This my father-in-law agreed to, and so my path was smoothed—with what justice we will not discuss.

When a bankrupt's assignee has been chosen, it is in the power of that assignee to worry and annoy the bankrupt very much. The rule through this stage of the whitewashing process is—like the rest of the proceedings in bankruptcy—the rule of thumb; there is, in fact, no rule. I know of one young man, who, after having, like myself, lost his situation in a merchant's office owing to being imprisoned for debt, obtained, with great difficulty, another situation shortly after the choice of assignee. The latter owed him a grudge, and insisted that he should attend upon him to verify accounts at three P.M. every day, the hour when the young man was busiest in his office. He remonstrated, but the assignee would listen to nothing, and said that if he did not attend at that hour he (the as-

signee) would represent to the Commissioner at the next meeting that the bankrupt had not done his utmost to give an account of his estate. He had to give up his appointment, and was ruined.

But having satisfied my assignee, I had no such consequence to fear. On the day appointed, I appeared in court, and the whole affair did not last half an hour. “*In re Smith*,” said the clerk of the court; when up got Ferkinson and said, “I appear for the assignee, your Honour, who is perfectly content with the assistance the bankrupt has afforded him in making up his accounts.” “I should like to examine the bankrupt,” said the Commissioner. I stepped into the witness-box; and being duly sworn, said that I attributed my failure to insufficiency of income arising from trade being bad, and from my commissions as a commercial traveller being very much reduced; also, to pressure from creditors. The Commissioner was very kind in his manner, and, it being officially asked two or three times whether there was any opposition “*In re Smith*,” and no answer being given, I was declared discharged, and was thenceforward free. My father-in-law kept his word; Tossels in time got his money. I obtained another situation.

And now, if any one asks why I wrote this description of my “difficulties,” I reply that I wrote it to point out the anomalies of our English bankruptcy laws. Some one has said that the worst thing you can do with a man is to hang him. I add, that the next worst thing you can do with him is to put him in prison. And above all, as I pointed out in my second chapter, how is it that, in a country which boasts of its justice, a man who owes a comparatively small sum—and who is consequently supposed to be a comparatively poor man—can be imprisoned again and again for twenty days at a time, and yet the debt not be discharged?

Abolish imprisonment for debt, and a great deal of the rash credit now given will be abolished with it. Men of all classes will live more within their means. I do not say that there should be no remedy for creditors. But it is not through the imprisonment of debtors, nor through the Bankruptcy Court, that they will find their remedy.

PROLL. A MYSTERY.

In the last will and testament of Mr. John Smith, of Allsop-terrace, Halifax (the instrument may be consulted by the incredulous at the usual expense of a shilling and patience), will be found a paragraph to the following effect:

“Also, I give and bequeath to ‘Proll,’ whatever or whomsoever that may prove to be, his or her heirs or legal representatives, the sum of three thousand pounds Three per Cent Consolidated Bank Annuities, desiring that my executors, hereinafter named, shall make every reasonable effort for the discovery of the aforesaid ‘Proll,’

his or her, &c. ; which efforts shall comprise an advertisement, thrice repeated, in a leading London journal, as well as the local papers of Liverpool and Birmingham. And, in default of such efforts proving successful within a year and a day, then my said executors shall expend the fund aforesaid in the purchase of some sufficing tokens for the reward of any remarkable deeds of personal prowess, which shall be and occur within three years of my decease."

The singular wording of this bequest created much local interest at the time, and attracted an unusual amount of attention to the character and history of a harmless little man who might have otherwise slipped out of this bustling world as noiselessly as he had dwelt in it.

Mr. John Smith was the only son of a Halifax apothecary, who left him at his death, which did not occur until the "boy" was past forty, the possessor of an income of five hundred pounds a year. John had been destined (in his cradle) for his father's profession; but nature, in the form of a peculiarly timid and susceptible temperament, raised such objections, that the project had to be abandoned, and trout-fishing in summer, and snipe-shooting in winter, formed the leading occupations of the young man's life, until these sports were interrupted, for a season, by the decease of his respected sire, and the consequent duty of looking into his own affairs. This discharged, Mr. John returned to the snipe and trout with undiminished ardour.

The change in his habits was, indeed, so slight as to be hardly perceptible. Even the two old servants, husband and wife, who had, from time immemorial to *him*, formed the domestic establishment, and whom he (John) had, from kindly motives, dismissed, superannuated, with a handsome allowance, insisting that Master John was not getting on nicely without them, came quietly back; dismissed, without the slightest ceremony, the provisional maid; and resumed their accustomed duties with all the vigour of youth!

John Smith has been described, by a gentleman who lived in his immediate neighbourhood, as an under-educated but well-mannered little man, with a pug nose, watery eyes, and a funny little flickering smile, which seemed to have been caught from the ripple of the brook over which it had been his delight to hang since boyhood. Take John Smith altogether, body and mind, he was perhaps the very last individual in the world to whom anything romantic or mysterious was likely to attach. And yet John Smith had a romance and a mystery; and (like a queer little parenthesis in the social annals of the world) here we chronicle the same, taking up the history about two years subsequent to the commencement of John's orphanhood.

Although Mr. Smith had never been in the habit of giving regular dinner-parties, it was a frequent custom with him to invite two or three of his chief gossips to partake of a brace of Wandle trout, most of which, weight, condition, disposition, and all, were (while yet in their native element) so well known to that

experienced fisherman, that it must have been like diminishing the circle of his personal acquaintance to dine upon them. These, with a neck of mutton and any pretty little tiny kickshaw, such as Justice Shallow with commendable judgment delegated to his cook, formed a light and pleasant banquet, which left the intellect clear, and temper sweet, for the rubber of threepenny whist that wound up the evening.

It was on one of these festive occasions that attention was drawn to the first of a series of remarkable objects, which seemed altogether out of keeping with the modest adornments of the Smith mansion. It was a massive silver chalice, of most beautiful workmanship, displaying three compartments, on which were represented scenes from the "tauro-machia," or classic bull fights. It stood upon a blue velvet-covered pedestal, beneath a glass case, which, while it permitted a full inspection of the masterly devices on its gleaming sides, protected the exquisite object from dust or soil.

"Hallo, Jack, that's a fine thing!" remarked friend number one, suddenly awakening, as it seemed, to the merits of the "thing" to which he had been sitting opposite for half an hour. "I must put on my specs for this. *Magnificent*, by jingo! Look at it, Gripper. *Toro*—what? Was this your father's, Jack?"

Mr. Smith coloured and hesitated.

"Well, no. My father he didn't seem to care much about them sort of things; but, I say, Gripper, just you try that brown sherry. Join us, Peters, will you?"

"If I were to be guilty of the vulgarity of appraising a man's property at his own table," said Mr. Slade, the curate, "I should be disposed to affirm that the individual who became possessed of that chalice at anything under three hundred and fifty pounds, was a lucky fellow."

"Where upon earth did he get it?" said friend number three to friend number four. "I didn't give our host credit for tastes of this kind."

"Aba! There's a mystery, I take it, about that chalice," remarked the ungrateful Gripper, who, even while swallowing the brown sherry, intended to silence him, had noticed the embarrassment of the little host. "I must examine more minutely;" and he stretched out his hand towards the cup.

Smith caught him nervously by the sleeve. "Not for worlds, old fellow! Let it alone, can't you?" he gasped; and sank back into his chair with a perceptible shiver. Mr. Slade adroitly turned the conversation.

Several months passed, yet the surprise created by Mr. Smith's purchase had not wholly subsided, when a second and yet more costly object made its appearance in the drawing-room at Allsp-terrace. This time it was a gigantic vase, than which may be seen (especially in Germany) many baths of smaller dimensions. It was composed of about equal quantities of gold and silver, and was, like its predecessor,

surrounded with devices of the rarest mould—the subjects, in this case, being suggestive of stirring incidents of the chase, or war. The rich cover was crested with the design of a matador (in solid gold) giving the finishing touch to a white Andalusian bull in a frenzy of silver. It must have been worth, at the very lowest estimate, a thousand guineas.

Mr. Smith was as reticent and as embarrassed as ever, and his friends had to fall back entirely on conjecture.

What in the world did it mean? Could the donor have been some grateful patient of the deceased apothecary? But no; for why conceal what would be so honourable to all the parties concerned? Could it be that a sudden monomaniacal passion for objects of this description had possessed John Smith even to the absorption of full two years' income in a single purchase? Hardly *that*, for he was sane and shrewd enough in other things. And, besides, how would the timid, nervous little gentleman have been able to summon the courage and decision required to complete such a bargain? The curiosity on the subject grew almost into pain.

"Come now, you know; tell us, old fellow, where these gold and silver mines of yours are situated?" inquired the somewhat rough-mannered Mr. Gripper, adopting that frank tone which, indeed, was fairly his own, but was intended, on this occasion, to invite a corresponding frankness.

"I—I don't know what you mean," replied Mr. Smith, the wan smile flickering in and out of his irresolute face, like a damp wick that will not ignite kindly.

"Now, I'll tell you what, my friend," resumed Mr. Gripper, setting his teeth in the truculent manner which always warned his interlocutors that he was going to say something very unpleasant indeed, "*I see it all.*"

Mr. Smith looked disturbed, but it was not the agitation of one whose secret is on the point of being discovered. On the contrary, it was with something that seemed like curiosity, that he ejaculated, with unusual emphasis:

"Then wh—what the devil *is it?*"

"There's a woman, and a woman with money, you lucky dog, in the case."

"In what case? Where?" gasped Mr. Smith, in sudden terror.

"In love with *you*, that's all!"

Mr. Smith turned deadly pale. His hair, had its constitution permitted, would have assumed an erect position.

"Heaven forbid! In love with *me*? What ever have I done? Come, Gripper, you're always ready with your chaff, *ain't* you, now?" said poor little Smith, almost piteously. "Say you're a-quizzing, now."

"Truth, John, is kindest," replied the inflexible Gripper. "It is my painful duty to arouse you to the fact that you have, wittingly or otherwise (*I* am not your judge), ensnared the affection of some confiding woman, with a good balance at her banker's, whose homage, in the form of gifts, you, with a baseness of which,

I should have believed you incapable, do not scruple to accept, intending, all the while, to—to—in fact," concluded Mr. Gripper, shortly, "to throw her over."

"Over what? Who? Which? What are you talking about?" stammered poor Smith. "I wish, Gripper, you wouldn't be such a fool!"

"Fool, sir!"

"And don't talk so loud, please," continued the other, looking nervously round. "You don't know who might hear, and perhaps believe your chaff; for it is chaff, now, ain't it? Come, be neighbours, now, and don't let's have no more of this."

"That will wholly depend upon the course I see you adopt," said Mr. Gripper, guardedly. (He was a good-natured man, and loved a joke, but his serious manner, and a gloomy look he had the gift of assuming at pleasure, frequently imposed upon his friends.) "Now, sir, unless you think fit to communicate the whole of this nefarious plot to me, I—I will not answer for what, as a matter of honour and humanity, I may not feel bound to do."

"Plot? Whose plot? Why do you talk to me as if I was a Guy Fawkes?" pleaded poor Smith, in a tone of such distress that Mr. Gripper all but abandoned his joke.

"From whence come these magnificent presents? And why, sir, do you colour and hesitate when questioned on the matter?" retorted Gripper, sternly. "No one suspects you of having stolen them. As little could you afford to become their purchaser; and where the deuce you came by the judgment to select them, if your funds permitted, is the greatest mystery of all. There is but *one* solution; *that*, sir, which I have suggested. As man to man, I demand—yes, demand—an explanation."

Mr. Gripper folded his arms, and called up a front of extraordinary gloom.

Perhaps he overdid it a little. Perhaps a dim consciousness that Mr. Gripper had no more business with the matter than the Tycoon of Japan, awoke, in the gentle bosom of poor little Smith, the slumbering man. At all events, with an energy he was never known to display before or since, he confronted his scowling friend, and, making the most of the niggard stature meted out to him, boldly replied:

"Then, sir, I refuse; and the sooner you can make it convenient to quit my house, the better."

"Quit your house?" echoed Mr. Gripper, dismissing his frown and joke together. "Not till I have shaken hands with one of the heartiest and pluckiest fellows in the whole range of my acquaintance. By Jove, Smith, what a spitfire you are becoming!"

"Think so?" said Mr. Smith, rubbing his hands, and at once returning to good humour. "No, no."

"Couldn't you *see* that I was only chaffing you?" asked his friend; and, shortly after, took his leave, much disgusted at not having been able to discover the secret.

Greater surprises were in store. Mr. Slade,

who was rather near-sighted, was entering one evening his friend's always open hall door, when he was startled by a flash of steel and gold, and a tall menacing figure, armed with a glittering lance, seemed to be about to make a target of his breast. Mr. Slade reeled instinctively back against the door, and then perceived that his assailant was only the case of a warrior; being, in fact, a magnificent suit of Milan armour—silken surcoat and all, complete—and which, being placed across a mighty block of wood, in default of a steed, represented a knight in the tilt-yard in act to charge. A diadem encircling the wrought helm, denoted that this costly equipment had enclosed the limbs of some chivalrous prince in ages passed away.

The good curate was still rubbing his eyes, and marvelling at such an object encountered in such a place, when Mr. Smith hustled in.

"Why, Smith, what have you got here? My good friend, this is a treasure indeed!"

"Ah! I thought you'd like my Lazy Sally, and was 'oping you'd look in," replied the virtuoso. "There, you needn't go too close. It looks 'alf as well again at a distance," he added, nervously.

"Your Lazy Sally!" ejaculated Slade. "Why do you call it so?"

"'Cause that's its name," retorted Mr. Smith. "Look 'ere!" and he pointed to a device and legend on the shield borne by the kingly champion.

Short-sighted Mr. Slade put on his glasses, and made out, for device, a bull's head and neck encircled by a broken chain; and, for motto, the well-known words in which the marshal of a tournament gave signal to engage:

"*Laissez aller.*"

"Lazy Sally! I said so," exclaimed the lover of art. "I wish it wasn't quite so big, though. Where ever it's to stand—"

"Why, Smith, you are collecting quite a museum?" remarked the curate. "You will want a custodian shortly."

"Well; I don't think it'll come to *that*," said Smith. "I shan't outrun the constable."

Mr. Slade laughed, and observed that his friend had slightly mistaken his meaning.

The curate's prophecy seemed likely to come true. Other objects of art continued to arrive at uncertain intervals, until not a room in the house but could boast of at least one rich and beautiful specimen, selected by a taste as pure as the expenditure it must have involved was liberal. Mr. Smith's collection arrived at the value of, at least, fifteen thousand pounds; and it was not unusual for persons in the county, who delighted in such things, to travel considerable distances to visit the accomplished proprietor, and congratulate him on his acquisitions and the refined art-knowledge which dictated their selection. The suit of Milan armour was an especial attraction, and was rendered more interesting by the circumstance that an inscription had been discovered on the breast-plate beneath the surcoat. It had, however, been purposely obliterated, and now only con-

veyed a suspicion that it had been in modern English, without affording any clue to its significance.

Thus matters went on, until the "unmoved Fates," who spare the harmless as little as the oppressor, knocked at the quiet door in Allsop-terrace, and imperatively demanded the body of Mr. John Smith.

The pretence was this. One day, towards the closing of the trout-season, when your sworn piscator grows keen and jealous of his diminishing sport, Mr. Smith—while in the heat of a life-and-death contest with a four-pound patriarch, whose time (John felt) was more than up—slipped down the bank, and into a deep pool. He was, it is true, rescued by some husbandmen and fished up, not only alive, but victorious, still holding to his prize. But the results were serious. The poor little man caught a cold that set its fangs in his delicate chest, and ultimately sucked away his life.

When conscious of his approaching end, he sent for his friend Slade, and requested him to allow himself to be named co-executor with their gossip, Tom Gripper, to carry out, among other things, a purpose he had greatly at heart. It need hardly be said that his old friend consented, and, thereupon, John Smith disburdened his mind of a little romance of private life, which may possibly be held not unworthy of a page in these records of the rolling year.

About twelve years before, and about three years subsequent to his father's death, John received a mysterious consignment, which, being opened, revealed that exquisite silver chalice which first attracted his neighbour's curiosity. A card accompanied it, on which, in a beautiful female hand, were written these words:

"To J. S. From the deeply grateful and admiring PROLL."

And, in plain but unobtrusive characters, below the rim of the chalice, was engraven:

"To the intrepid Smith."

Perplexed in the extreme, John carefully laid up the chalice, hoping that the mystery would in some manner elucidate itself, and not without fear that he might be suddenly called upon to account for appropriating what was certainly intended for another of his by no means uncommon name. And "Proll," who on earth was "Proll?" Was it Proll? Yes. There was no mistake as to the spelling. Proll might have been more natural, more familiar. No. Proll it was.

All doubts, however, were dispelled by the alarming receipt of the second present, the vase, accompanied by a note from "Proll," expressing her regret that Mr. Smith's modesty—a quality that always attends true courage—should have deterred him from exhibiting to his friends the former testimony of her gratitude and enthusiastic admiration. "I know you," Proll concluded, "John Smith, of 9, Allsop-terrace, though you know not me. And your Proll, your grateful but invisible protectress, Proll, will I remain until my dying day."

"Whatever I've done for to make anybody

so grateful," said poor little Smith, his wan smile wanner than ever, "I *can't* understand."

Slade could not help him on this point, so, to turn the conversation, asked his friend why he had evinced so marked a disinclination to having Proll's gifts closely examined?

John seemed embarrassed for a moment, then he said :

" Well, it don't matter now; so here's the truth. Some of my friends—not *you*, Slade" (affectionately pressing his hand), "ave been in the 'abit of chaffing me 'cause I was a nervous sort of timid chap, and these cups and things of Proll's seemed as if they was a-chaffing too. Every one of them, you see's talking of my courage, my 'ardihood, and so forth. There's a mottor on each. On the vase was written, 'To the brave, devoted Smith.' On the stomach of that harmour, was 'Tribute to death-defying 'ardihood, in the person of the noble-arter'd Smith.' And so 'tis in all of 'em. Somehow, though I couldn't bring myself to believe that Proll was laughing at me in her sleeve, I knew it would set those fellows off, so I scratched out the writing on the harmour's stomach, and wouldn't let no one look too close at t'other things, you see. Now, what I want you for to do is this," continued the invalid, raising himself on the pillow. "O' course, this is all gammon. Proll must be a lunatic. I never did her any service. How could I, as have lived quiet here, since I was born? I feel as if I'd been taking money and gimbcracks all my life from Proll's family, which may want 'em. There may be old Prolls, or little Prolls, or, in short, my good friend, I have made up my mind to leave' a thumping legacy to Proll, at all events, and you must find her out if you can. I know you will try. And, if you can't," concluded the speaker, faintly, for he was getting wearied with his long speech, "there shall be a clause providing rewards for other brave chaps like *me*, you know," he smiled, "so that, perhaps, somehow, after all, the right J. S. may come in for one of Proll's pretty thingumbobs."

Later the same evening, as Slade again sat beside his friend, awaiting the solicitor who was to receive instructions for the intended legacy, the curate quietly revived the subject of Proll's mysterious gifts.

" You are quite *certain*—think, now, John—that you have never been in a position to render some extraordinary and timely service to this Proll?"

" Never, on my word," said Mr. Smith, emphatically.

" It is very singular," resumed Mr. Slade, pondering. " Do you know—but tell me, first, has any event of real importance, such, I mean, as would remain among the best-remembered incidents of an ordinary experience, ever occurred to you, that might, indirectly, perchance, connect itself with this enigma? Think."

John reflected.

" Except that—in June, 'forty-two—I landed—"

" Yes?" cried his friend, eagerly, observing that he paused. " You landed. How? Where?"

" In the pool, below the weir," replied Mr. Smith, faintly. " I landed him—in twenty minutes—with a single gut—brown partridge fly. He weighed nine pounds and a hounce!"

Mr. Slade fell into another reverie. Suddenly he resumed :

" It occurs to me, Smith, as not a little remarkable, that every one of these mysterious offerings contains some reference to an *ox*."

" A hox!" ejaculated the invalid. " Hox?"

" Or bull. It is an ancient sacrifice, a bull-fight in the arena, or even a crest or device, as in the armour instance. Now *that*, to my mind, has a decided significance. Did you ever—say, in your reckless youth, my friend—have a misunderstanding with a bull?"

" *I!*" exclaimed poor Smith. " Stay, though. With a hox, I *ad*."

" Ha!" said the curate, brightening up; " how was that?"

" I was a walking quietly down Hollow-cross-lane, when there come a-bellering be'ind me; and a man rushed past, crying out that a infuriated hox had broke out, and was coming down the lane! I heard him tramping, and ran on; but there was a quickset hedge on each side, and no gate. So I made a tremenjious leap, and got over."

" And were in safety?"

" Why, no," replied Mr. Smith. " The hag-gravating beast had previously adopted a similar course, and was in the field before me. I saw his great broad forehead, heard a shriek (but whether 'twas my own voice or somebody else's, I'm afraid to say), and, being knocked down insensible, knew nothing more, till I woke in my own 'ouse, with Hannah bathing my 'ed."

" Then the matter is as unaccountable as ever," remarked the curate, with a disappointed sigh.

The conversation was never renewed, for poor little Smith was beginning to sink, and two short days comprised all that was left of his insensative life.

More than scrupulously did the friendly executors endeavour to fulfil the duty imposed on them; but their quest of Proll was unsuccessful. They had ceased the hopeless inquiry, and had begun to consult as to the best mode of carrying out the alternative measure provided by the will, when, one morning, a visitor sent in his card to Mr. Slade.

" Colonel Commerell."

The colonel, who appeared about forty-five, and whose countenance was bronzed by an Indian sun, was a man of stately presence, and frank, yet gentlemanly, manner.

" I am just returned, sir," he said, " from a long period of foreign service, during the latter part of which my communications with home

have been somewhat irregular. My attention has only now been directed to your advertisement, addressed to 'Proll.'

"God bless me! are *you* Proll?" exclaimed the curate, starting from his seat.

The colonel laughed.

"Well, no," he replied. "My *wife* is. At her desire I am here to explain what, judging from the terms of your advertisement, has remained too long a mystery. So, poor Mr. Smith is gone? Well! Peace to the brave."

"Ehem," said Mr. Slade. "To be sure. Yes."

"It was an act, sir," said the colonel, enthusiastically, "worthy of the brightest age of chivalry."

"You don't say—that is, do you think so?" said Mr. Slade, cautiously.

"Indeed I do. But let me relate, in a few words, what you don't know of this matter."

"You might relate what I *do* in fewer still," thought Mr. Slade.)

"When I was a jolly young cornet," continued his visitor, "I had the good hap to engage the affections of one who—God be praised!—is still the blessing of my home. She was an only child: heiress, in prospect, of very great wealth. Her father looked to unite her to a member of the noble house with which he was already distantly connected, and, having some suspicion of our attachment, hurried Rosina off, for a time, to the residence of a relative who lived in a sequestered neighbourhood three miles from hence. Singularly enough, my regiment was ordered into this very district. Quite as remarkable was it, that my wife's father never knew of that coincidence. So palpable an interposition of fate was not to be neglected. We met as often as possible. Show myself I dared not in the quiet walks of Copfold. So Rosina mounted a rough pony, made over to her by her aunt for excursions beyond the park limits, and flew across to meet me in the willow meadows, near Hollow-cross Farm.

"On one of these occasions she had tied up her pony in the little copse, and was tripping across a field, when she was alarmed by distant shouts, and, turning, found herself within twenty yards of a furious bullock, which had plunged through a gap in the hedge, and was making directly for her. She had given herself up for lost, when a man—a little man, too—with a desperate bound, cleared the hedge, and threw himself between her and the raging animal! That prompt and generous action probably saved her life. She was preserved. So was *he*! for the farm people were at hand, and Rosina, from behind the hedge, could perceive

that, though knocked down, her champion was not gored, and was receiving all the assistance his case demanded.

"Well, sir, the interposition of friends reconciled Rosina's father to my suit. We were married, my wife receiving a magnificent dowry. One of the first uses she made of it was to commence that series of grateful offerings, which doubtless reached their destination. The mystery was rendered necessary by my wife's unwillingness to let it be known how indifferently that dear old lady at Copfold had fulfilled the office of her keeper. Hence, she adopted for her name a nursery appellation, which has, you will observe, about as striking a resemblance to the real one, as such pet names usually bear. Poor, gallant Smith! Well, well! The remembrance of such an act of heroism may—modest as he was—have brought with it a certain sense of satisfaction. Yet, had any one whispered so much in his dying ear, he would probably have faltered out: 'Merely my duty.'

Mr. Slade coughed.

"Courage, colonel, I have heard, is constitutional, and—"

"I don't know about that," returned the colonel. "For my own part, though I have seen a shot or two, and stood my ground no worse, I hope, than others;—if I saw a mad bull preparing to charge, hang me if I shouldn't be inclined to turn tail, provided there was cover at hand!" And the colonel looked as little like a man who would keep his word herein, as he could well look.

"I am at least certain," said Mr. Slade, in a low voice, "that had our departed friend been more fully sensible of the service he had rendered, he would have felt deeply grateful for having been the instrument of so providential a deliverance."

"As meek as he was intrepid, eh?" said Colonel Commerell. "A beautiful combination! And now let me complete my mission. Proll, that is, Mrs. Commerell, positively refuses to hear of 'anything to her advantage,' resulting from Mr. Smith's will, save the gratification of knowing that the brave fellow remembered her. Your solicitor, whom I saw in my way hither, favoured me with a copy of the codicil. My wife will most gladly co-operate with you in carrying out the admirable object of rewarding deeds of self-devotion. It is a thing we rarely do in England, where duty—no matter to what extreme it be carried—is popularly, though I think erroneously, believed to provide its own reward."

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